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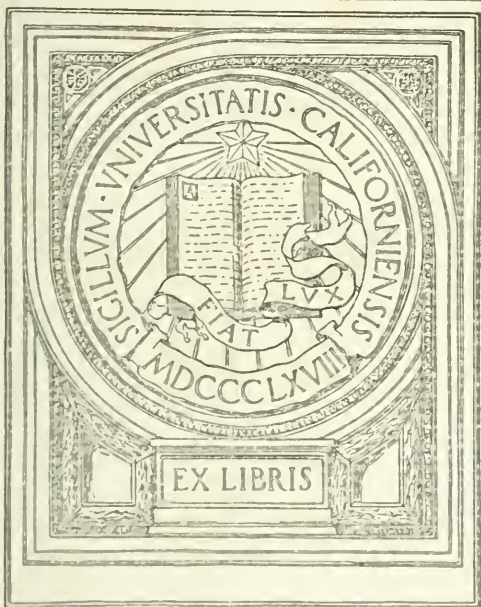
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HERBERT LACY.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF GRANBY.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

La morale est la science des sciences à ne la considérer que sous le rapport du calcul ; et il y a toujours des limites à l'esprit de ceux qui n'ont pas senti l'harmonie de la nature des choses avec les devoirs de l'homme.

MADAME DE STAEL.

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HERBERT LACY.

CHAPTER I.

We must not make a scarecrow of the law,
Setting it up to scare the birds of prey,
And let it keep one shape, till custom make it
Their perch, and not their terror.

Measure for Measure.

MR. MORTON'S letter to Sackville caused neither surprise nor sorrow to the latter. The event of the execution was not unexpected nor unwelcome. On the contrary, it had been promoted by himself, under the agency of Allen, acting on the fears and impatience of Mr. Morton's other creditors; and the time at which it had been carried into effect had been expressly

marked by his direction. He had secured to himself the hand of Agnes, by terrifying her weak father with the prospect of a discovery of his embarrassment; and, having gained this object, he no longer feared to realize the threatened evil. His motives for procuring the execution to be levied against Mr. Morton were chiefly economical; and their object was to check that course of expence, which was every day adding to the frightful magnitude of his embarrassments.

The fortune of Agnes he regarded as eventually his own; and, though he intended after their union to resist her wish of liberally administering to the necessities of her parents, he considered it desirable that those necessities should be previously contracted as much as possible, and that the accumulation of debt should be checked. He also thought it better that the situation of Mr. Morton should be known to the world before his marriage with Agnes. There would be something apparently

disinterested in marrying the daughter of a ruined man, even though that daughter were an independent heiress ; and it would give to his mercenary match the amiable colouring of the purest affection. Besides, if assistance must be afforded, it would be both cheaper and more meritorious to relieve the humble wants of acknowledged poverty, than to minister to the private cravings of habitual extravagance.

It was therefore decided that the life of profusion which Mr. Morton had so long led, must have its immediate end, and that he should at length be taught retrenchment in the bitter school of undisguised adversity. This was one of his objects ; the other was of a much darker character. It was not sufficient that the blow should be struck, unless it could be made instrumental to setting at variance the Mortons and Lacys, and blackening the character of the latter. His measures, with respect to Herbert Lacy, were no longer dictated by mere precaution. Jealousy and hate now urged him to

pursue, unnecessarily, for their gratification, those plots which were first prescribed by the calculations of self-interest. He hated the man whom he had injured; hated him *because* he had injured him. He knew that Agnes had loved, and still, at least, respected and esteemed him; and this he could not brook. Had she been his at that moment he would not have deemed his triumph sufficient, unless he could have caused her to look with abhorrence on the object of her first attachment.

We will now conduct our readers to Mr. Sackville's seat at 'Trentford. The time will be a few hours after the arrival of Mr. Morton's letter. The place, a room somewhat too spacious and elegant for the antiquated name of study, yet to which those of library or drawing-room would be equally inapplicable. It presented to the eye various insignia, alike of business and of literary leisure; and the spectator, like Hercules, pressed to make his choice, stood perplexed among the various inducements to exertion and

to indolence. A solemn, business-like inkstand, of large dimensions, was opposed to the last luxurious contrivance for easy reading, a chair, ostensibly for study, but more truly calculated for sleep; tape-tied papers were relieved by a review; and a large blue report of the bullion committee, was surmounted (*proh pudor!*) by the last new novel. Newspapers, and a few of the minor fry of periodical works, filled up the intervals, together with numerous pamphlets "from the author," on the corn, catholic, and other questions.

Sackville was alone in this apartment. A book was in his hand, but his mind seemed to be otherwise engaged. His look was that of disappointment and impatience; and he muttered, from time to time, half audible expressions, as if taxing some person with delay. At length his anxiety was appeased by the entrance of a servant, who said that Mr. Allen desired to see him, and presently that person was introduced.

"It matters not," said Sackville, when, after

the first greetings, Allen began to apologize for his delay; "it matters not; and now to business. First read this letter," and he put into his hands that which he had received from Mr. Morton. "So far, good. Your friend, the suing creditor, may congratulate himself on having given the victory to his own party; and you, Allen, may congratulate yourself on having done a substantial kindness to Mr. Morton."

Allen smiled, as if at the irony of the observation.

"I speak seriously," replied Sackville; "I do consider it a kindness, and it was meant as such by me. It will open his eyes to his real situation. It would have been better for him if it had happened long ago, but I hope it will not come too late to save him."

"I am sure, Sir, I hope so as much as you can do," said Allen, with a demure, half suppressed smile, as if he fully penetrated the hypocrisy of Sackville's expressions. Sackville gave him a short, inquiring look, and then proceeded.

“ I said the execution was well timed. I do not know whether you understand me ; if not, I must explain. You are aware that it has forced him to resign the contest, and has given the victory to the other party. Nothing could happen better for them ; if they had devised the business themselves they could not have devised it more successfully.”

Allen assented.

“ Well,” pursued Sackville, “ now, I ask, may not Mr. Morton reasonably suppose that they actually did contrive it ? Your friend, the suing creditor, is a voter on the Lacy side ; he may have acted, not only for his own individual benefit, but for the advantage of his party ; and Mr. Lacy might have known what was to happen, and have even advised and encouraged the measure.”

“ He might, certainly,” replied Allen, doggedly ; “ but I know, for my own part, that he had nothing to do with it.”

“ I know that too ; but others need not know

the same. In short, to come to the point at once, I wish that Mr. Morton should think that he was the instigator of all that has happened. I have paved the way to this belief in a manner which I will afterwards explain. The means of instilling it further I shall then leave to you. I know, my friend, that you have a plausible tongue, and a good resolute face, and a very fertile invention. I shall not ask you to do any thing disgraceful,—to tell coarse, plump, flaring lies,—simply to insinuate. I want a proof of your address; but, ‘a word to the wise’—you understand me—let it be as I desire, and you shall find me not ungrateful.”

Allen looked grave and thoughtful.

“I understand you, Sir,” said he; “and I believe you know that I would do a great deal to serve you; but I must honestly tell you that I do not like this business. I should be very sorry to engage in it, and I must beg you will excuse me.”

“Impossible,” said Sackville, drily.

“I have no heart of it,” continued Allen. “I think it is much such another business as the last, and you know how that turned out.”

“That was an unfortunate affair, I acknowledge. The duel was quite unexpected, and might have had very serious consequences; though, as it happened, no evil resulted from it, and the parties became better friends than before. But here I promise you that there shall be no fighting; not even a lawsuit, Allen, which is more in your style of hostility. The parties shall not exchange one angry word, and every thing shall be conducted with a due regard to your most peaceable intentions.”

“That may be, Sir—that may be; but I don’t see the object, and I don’t like the principle. Here is a young gentleman to be taxed unjustly, and made to appear in a shameful light; and here is Mr. Morton made to bear all sorts of ill will towards a person that does not deserve it. I cannot think that this is

right, Sir, and I don't like to have a hand in it."

"Indeed!" said Sackville, with a scornful smile. "You are grown mightily conscientious! Allen, I must tell you plainly that I think you might have had somewhat more confidence in me. You need not have supposed so readily that my motives must be wrong, merely because you could not understand them. You say you cannot see the object—nor do I intend you to see it. You force me to speak plainly—you are my instrument, Sir, and not my fellow counsellor. You do not see the great and useful end I have in view, and you are starting at what you consider the equivocal nature of the means. Perhaps you don't know that in questions of morality, the means are totally disregarded; the end is the only thing considered. Nobody can be said to have acted either ill or well till the whole of his conduct can be viewed together. If you want an apology for evil

means, only look at the scheme of Providence. Nature works by them as well as by that which is good—and surely always for a happy end. Why are lightnings and earthquakes permitted? Why do vipers encumber the earth? Why are murderers and robbers, aye, and forgers, left unpunished? I tell you they have all their use. Let me have no more scruples. It may be some poor satisfaction to you to express them; but they can have no effect upon me, because I know that they are needless. I say these things, not to exculpate myself, but to satisfy you. It was unnecessary for me to have explained my sentiments so fully; but I wished to act a friendly part, and I expect that you will show your sense of it.”

“Mr. Sackville,” replied Allen, in a submissive tone, “I beg your pardon, if I seemed to accuse you of meaning to do what was wrong. I am sure I have as much confidence in you as I should have in any gentleman that was to make the same proposal to me. I am a plain, simple

man, Sir, and what little learning I have, has been picked up here and there, as I best could. I am sure I won't pretend to argue with you about the morality of the case: I leave all that to you, Sir. I dare say it is quite correct, since you say it is. But I hope you will consider, that whether it may be right or not in the end, it will be a very dangerous business for me."

"Dangerous!" exclaimed Sackville, with a laugh. "Oh, then, it is fear, and not morality, that makes you so scrupulous on this occasion."

"You may laugh, Sir, and call it fear," said Allen; "but I cannot see that there is any shame in being mindful of consequences."

"No: nor do I wish you to be unmindful of them; but be pleased to recollect the consequences of disobeying me."

A silence ensued. Sackville turned away, leaving his hint to operate; and Allen, with a dark and troubled countenance, was reflecting on the most advisable answer to such a denunciation.

“I do not wish to disobey you, Sir,” said he, “and I will give you a proof it. Here, Sir, at this moment, I am ready to promise to do what you ask, upon condition that you will first grant me one little favour.”

“I cannot listen to conditions; I asked for compliance, without reserve.”

“Nay, but the favour is so trifling.”

“Well, then, name it.”

“Then, Sir, I ask you to let me first see—*that paper.*”

Sackville regarded him with surprise and suspicion.

“You have made a strange request,” said he; “what profit or pleasure can you find in looking at your own forgery?”

Allen returned no answer.

“This is mere trifling, Allen. If you have a sufficient reason, tell it; but don’t suppose that I can go out of my way to gratify an idle whim.”

“I am sorry to hear it, Sir, because, in this

case, neither can I go out of my way to do as you desired me."

"Good God ! but consider the consequences."

"Yes, Sir, I do consider the consequences, and I shall leave them to follow as they may. I am very sorry to seem to thwart you, but I really cannot comply unless you grant me this favour."

"I understand it," thought Sackville. "The rascal has taken it into his head that I have not the power I assume ; that the paper is defective, or not in my possession. Perhaps it is better to undeceive him. A refusal would only confirm his suspicions—Allen," said he, sternly, "I cannot commend the reasonableness of your request ; but nevertheless, it shall be granted : " and so saying, he quitted the room, leaving Allen alone to all the gloomy retrospect of guilt, and the fearful hopes which he had then before him. His motives were partly such as Sackville had conjectured ; but in addition to

these, he had also proposed to himself the bold measure of forcibly seizing and destroying the forged paper. In a set struggle with Sackville, who was a strong and well-made man, he could have little chance of succeeding ; and he could therefore depend only upon craft, and the unexpectedness and rapidity of his movements. While he was arranging his plan of attack, and nerving his courage for the encounter, Sackville re-entered the room.

The first thing he did was to lock the door. Allen's anxious eyes were instantly turned towards him in expectation of the paper ; but he saw no such object in Sackville's hand ; he saw only the startling spectacle of a pistol, a powder-horn, and a bullet. Sackville neither spoke nor looked at him, but walked to the other end of the room, and deliberately began to load his pistol. Allen's heart sunk within him.

"Mr. Sackville ! the paper ?" said he, inquiringly.

Sackville neither looked up, nor answered him a word.

“Mr. Sackville—I trust—I don’t understand—I hope you will oblige me.”

Still no answer.

“Mr. Sackville, for God’s sake—pray explain!” said Allen, advancing.

“Stand back,” interrupted Sackville, sternly.

“I am not alarmed, Sir,” continued Allen; “I am still prepared to ask the same; it will do you little credit, Sir, to attack a defenceless man. Pray consider——”

“Peace! peace!” cried Sackville, with a look of scorn. “Do you think, if I wished to shorten your miserable life, it would not be the easier way to let the gallows do its office! I shall not take the trouble to hurt you;” and then having loaded his pistol, he rose and went to a large bureau which occupied a recess in the room. This he opened, and drew forth the ominous paper which contained Allen’s forgery.

He then turned towards that person, and approached him, holding in one hand the paper, and in the other, the loaded pistol.

“Allen,” said he, with a milder air, “you must excuse my precautions. Documents like this, which hold the power of life and death, are not to be shown lightly, especially to those who are interested in destroying them. I will not suppose that you thought so meanly of my discretion, as to imagine that I should put this into your hand as I would a newspaper. No—first look here ;” and so saying, he presented the pistol, levelled it at Allen’s breast, and cocked it. Allen started, and shrunk backward, in alarm. “Compose yourself,” continued Sackville, coolly, “and listen to what I am going to say. You are aware that with one slight motion of this forefinger, I could put an end to your existence ; yes—I see you are aware of it—good—and now I am going to gratify you. Here is the paper you wished to see. You shall not only see it, Sir, but you shall hold it in your

own hands. You may read, scrutinize, spell every syllable, count the letters if you choose ; but—if you make the slightest attempt to destroy it—move but one finger with such an intention, and that minute will be your last. There, receive your forgery.”

So saying, he placed in Allen’s hand the paper on which hung his life. A deathlike silence ensued. Allen stood motionless, holding before his eyes the fatal document, with the muzzle of Sackville’s pistol about a yard from his breast. The situation of Allen was inconceivably tremendous, and thoughts of the most terrible nature were conflicting in his mind, while his eyes were wandering over the writing, of which he distinguished not a line. Even at that moment, and in spite of Sackville’s awful threat, he was meditating the destruction of the paper ; and once he looked up to try if he could discern any symptoms of mercy or irresolution in the aspect of his opponent ; but he was met by a glance of deadly determination from Sack-

ville's eye, which indicated at once that he had not threatened one tittle that he would not execute.

Allen's countenance fell ; his resolution seemed to be blasted by that glance, and he felt his flesh creep with terror. All the awfulness of his situation burst at once upon him. He held in his hand one instrument for his own destruction, and another was before him. The deadly paper, and the deadly pistol—death by the law, and by the hand of Sackville—were present to his mind at once, and he seemed like a wretched captive, so environed by forms of death, that he could in no way fly from its influence. This impression, and the terrible risk he was meditating, were too powerful for his resolution. Cold drops started from the forehead of the miserable delinquent ; his lips quivered ; his eyes looked glazed and wandering ; his whole frame seemed to totter ; and, with a trembling hand, he restored the paper to Sackville. The latter received it in silence, and

surveying, with a look of contemptuous compassion, the pale and trembling figure of the unfortunate Allen, he poured out a glass of water and offered it to him to drink.

“Take this,” said he; “you have need of it: you have exposed yourself to an unnecessary trial; but you little thought it would be so severe. You will be wiser for the future. And now,” pursued Sackville, after a short pause, “I conclude that you will not refuse to do what I require.”

“I submit,” replied the other.

“Then you have nothing to fear; and if you second my views effectually, you shall have much to expect.”

Here ended the conversation, and the worthy confederates separated.

CHAPTER II.

Let us prove that our minds are no slaves to fortune ; and in adversity triumph over adversity.

SIR PHILIP SIDNEY.

THE sudden discovery and great extent of Mr. Morton's embarrassment, caused considerable surprise among his neighbours. In this land of commerce, public opinion is rather disposed to magnify the profits of successful speculation ; and, accordingly, the father of Mr. Morton was generally believed to have left him a much greater fortune than was really the case. Mr. Morton was conscious, from the first moment of possessing it, that he was considered a richer man than he was, and this delusion of the public he had ever since been most fatally

eager to strengthen. Regarding it, justly, as one of his most potent claims to respect, he had spared no pains to preserve, unimpeached, his character for opulence; and it is, therefore, not surprising that the world, which had hailed his opening career with a delusion, should have been still further blinded by his efforts to confirm it. That he had debts, was known to many; but this was supposed to proceed less from want, than from that carelessness which he always affected with respect to money, and few doubted his ability to pay them.

But, great as might be the surprise which his neighbours really felt at his unexpected ruin, they soon ceased to express any. Most of them were soon prepared with their budget of previous suspicions, and sure indications, and startling circumstances, which they would have mentioned long ago, if charity had not forbidden. Society abounds with these “prophets of the past,” who try to indemnify themselves for real short-sightedness, by pretending that the dis-

covery of their foresight was controlled only by their discretion or benevolence.

Lord Rodborough, contrary to his usual custom, laid no claim to such fore-knowledge. He thought it was better to be perfectly innocent of all previous acquaintance with the state of Mr. Morton's affairs; and that it would accord most becomingly with his dignified carelessness, not to have stooped to the consideration of so trivial a subject. He also chose to consider himself ill-used, by having been kept in the dark about it, which could not have been the case if he had entertained any previous suspicions. This appears to have been his first feeling, upon receiving the intelligence which Mr. Morton had dispatched to him, after retiring from the company of his supporters at Wichcombe.

"If the fellow was distressed," said his lordship, adjusting his cravat as he spoke,—
"Why the devil did not he tell me so? I like openness, especially in these money matters; it saves a d—d deal of inconvenience;" and under

this dignified view of the subject, he dispatched the answer which gave such violent, and, we may add, such just offence to Mr. Morton.

That unfortunate person was utterly depressed by this calamity. He felt degraded in the eye of the world, shrunk with horror from the idea of society, and could scarcely bear to meet the face of a familiar friend. He viewed himself, despondingly, and with some truth, in the light of a detected impostor. He knew that he had long deceived the world with a false show of affluence, and he feared that it would be found not backward in taking vengeance for the fraud. It is true that he was released from the burthen of supporting false appearances, and he tried, in his misery, to count it a relief. But those appearances, irksome as they might prove, had been among the main objects of his life. A bitter sense of the degradation which must ensue to himself and his family, formed the most poignant part of his afflictions. As for the deprivation of former luxuries, he viewed it, at first,

with comparative disregard ; such sacrifices seem ever trifling in the aggregate, and it is only when viewed and attempted separately, that their greatness becomes known. Besides, to one who was writhing, like Mr. Morton, under the infliction of imaginary contempt, it was even a consolation to be able, by personal privations, to lay some claim to the dignity of suffering.

He had, indeed, much to bear, and it was useless to disguise how much. His establishment must be broken up, his goods sold, and he must fly from Dodswell. He felt little difficulty in breaking these circumstances to Agnes, for he saw in her a strength of mind which would enable her to receive them calmly. She even anticipated the terrible necessity, and anticipated it almost with cheerfulness. But it was difficult to disclose the real extent of their misfortune to Lady Louisa, in such a way as to mitigate its severity. When she heard that all they had must be sold, even her very jewels, she

persisted, for some time, in discrediting the possibility of such an outrage.

But the methodical diligence of the sheriff's officers soon convinced her of the unhappy truth. They had immediately proceeded to take an inventory of all the moveable property that the house contained; and Lady Louisa found herself obliged to resign her jewels, and see them included in the list. Many and earnest were her entreaties for the exemption of her paraphernalia; and she vainly thought to shock and intimidate the myrmidons of the law, by informing them that they were laying their unhallowed hands on jewels that had been worn by a Duchess of Swansea. But she found that the dignity of the former possessor, was totally inapplicable to the present case, and was thrown into the last agony of despair, by being told civilly, but with an air of decision that admitted of no resistance, that any such exemption was impossible.

The under-sheriff appeared at Dodswell, and seemed desirous of softening, as far as was possible, the rigours of the law. Such simple moveables as were absolutely necessary, were allowed to be retained, and their fears were quieted, of being obliged to seek a new abode in a state of utter destitution. They had no complaints to make of harshness and brutality, on the part of those whose duty it was to execute the legal mandate. They received, from these authorised intruders, all the deference and civility which circumstances admitted, and it was evident that a wish was entertained to spare their feelings as much as possible.

But there are states of the mind in which this exemption from the very worst that can befall, is hardly received as a relief. Suffering seems robbed of that dignity, the sense of which supports us under it, when we find that far from our having endured its extremities, it has, notwithstanding its severity, still been alleviated. This unavailing mercy, which strives to lighten the

evil without being able to remove it, seems but a contemptuous tribute to our weakness. It unnerves our fortitude; and while it takes a little from the heap of our misfortunes, makes us more keenly sensible of all that remains.

These may not be the feelings most proper for the unfortunate, but they are very natural ones, especially in minds which have ever listened to the dictates of pride. They occurred in galling bitterness to Mr. Morton, and he never more strongly felt his degradation than when he found himself an object of compassion to a sheriff's officer.

On the second day after the dispatch of the letter to Sackville, that gentleman arrived at Dodswell. His presence was received by all as a welcome succour. Even Agnes was glad of his arrival; for though she had misgivings of the real goodness of his disposition, she could fully appreciate his companionable qualities, and had great reliance in his clear worldly sense and address in matters of business, and doubted

not that he would recommend such courses as were most advisable in their present situation. She had also another still more urgent reason for wishing to see him. He was one of the trustees in whose hands her own large fortune was placed, and she wished for his advice and permission in rendering that fortune available for the relief of her parents.

Hers was a cruel situation. Mistress of wealth, she was not only threatened with the evils of poverty, but compelled to see her parents exposed to it without being able to offer more than vague hopes of future assistance. Her mother evidently relied upon her for help, and somewhat too regardless of the sacrifice she was exacting, had almost expressed her opinion that the fortune of Agnes would save them from the necessity of quitting Dodswell. To these broad hints and distressing appeals, Agnes scarcely knew how to reply; and she feared lest her mother, who was inaccessible to all explanation

upon subjects of business, would attribute her reserve to the want rather of will than of power.

Agnes took an early opportunity of consulting with Sackville upon these important points, and earnestly entreated him to give his consent to the application of a large part of her fortune to the liquidation of her father's debts. Sackville seemed moved and interested by her appeal, assured her of his most entire sympathy, and promised to co-operate with her to the utmost of his power. He then began to point out the difficulties that lay in the way of his compliance. He reminded her that his single voice was insufficient for the adoption of any measure without the consent of Mr. Hawskworth, the other trustee ; and he assured her, that to the best of his belief that consent would not be obtained but with the utmost difficulty. He described to her the inflexible pertinacity of his colleague, the jealous vigilance with which he watched over

the accumulation of her fortune, and the probable earnestness with which he would resist any attempt to diminish it.

“But, improbable as it may be,” said Sackville, “we will suppose that his consent is gained: what will be the result? Very different from what you anticipate. You feel an amiable and generous wish to relieve your parents, and to restore them to their former situation, and you think that this may be done; but it is my duty to undeceive you, and to tell you that it is not possible. You may discharge some of the debts, it is true, out of your income: but you cannot enable your father to live here, as he has done. It is absolutely necessary that there should be a great and immediate retrenchment, and I need hardly tell you that this would be carried into effect much more completely by quitting Dodswell, than by remaining here. I think too, you will acknowledge, that such a course would be less painful to your father’s feelings. To live here still with straightened

means, while every thing around reminded him of former splendours, and of luxuries, and even comforts, which he must now deny himself, would be infinitely more galling than a much greater change of life elsewhere. It would be a subject of perpetual vexation; and I am confident, that it is wiser to suffer the shock of parting, than to endure, day by day, the lingering mortification which he would otherwise be exposed to."

Agnes concurred with him in the propriety of quitting Dodswell, but still urged her entreaty to be allowed to contribute to the liquidation of the debts. She alluded to their own engagement, and to the prospect of her fortune becoming eventually his; and appealed pointedly to his generosity, and remarked somewhat warmly on the imputations to which he might be exposed of thwarting her liberal views, because they might interfere with his future interests. She was animated by the strong desire of assisting her parents, and spoke

with an energy and decision, for which Sackville was unprepared, and which at first startled and perplexed him. Nevertheless, he heard her with calmness and patience, and answered without hesitation.

“ You have allowed yourself,” said he, “ to express a little doubt of the disinterestedness of my motives, but I know that it is an impression which you will not long maintain. It cannot affect me, and I will let it pass. You wish me to urge Mr. Hawskworth to join with me in satisfying the demands of your father’s creditors out of your fortune. Do you know whom I should have to pay ? Myself. Yes, I see you are surprised : but it is very true. I am one of your father’s principal creditors. I am not one of those who now sue him, nor will I partake of the spoil. I once hoped to have prevented what has now happened ; I became his creditor to save him from the rapacity of others—bought up several of his debts, and in so doing, became indebted myself. But

for me, what has now burst upon your father would have happened long ago. I will not say, that in the end it might not have been better for him, if his distresses had been made apparent sooner, but still I have a satisfaction in thinking that I postponed the evil day, and insured to you all a few more years of happiness. This is what I have done, and yet I live to hear my disinterestedness questioned, and by you, because I will not urge a measure, by which I myself should be an immediate gainer. Oh, Agnes, this is indeed a cruel return ; but you were not conscious of the whole truth, and if you had been so, I could excuse much at such a time."

Agnes expressed her sorrow for the injustice she had done him. Sackville declared himself satisfied, and proceeded.

"There is another view of the subject, in which I have not yet presented it to you. Suppose your whole fortune at your absolute disposal, and let us consider what, under present cir-

cumstances, would be the most judicious mode of proceeding. You should think not only of the present distresses of your parents, but of the future prospects of your brothers and sister. It is true, they have each a small independent fortune, but if this is all they are to look to, they will be ill provided for in after life. You should therefore so act as to benefit all, and this I assure you can never be done by opening the flood-gates of a lavish generosity. Economy and retrenchment are absolutely essential for the welfare of all, and you would be doing only an unkindness, by rendering it less strongly felt. Your father—I may safely say it, for you know my respect for his many good qualities—your father is very deficient in prudence. His present situation shows it; and I fear there would be little prospect of amendment, as long as he had the means of supporting his former extravagance. Your means are ample, but you must not think them inexhaustible. They would soon fail, and then what would be the

fate of all ! Be reconciled to what has occurred. This blow may prove a salutary warning. Good often springs out of evil."

A slight gleam of satisfaction passed across the countenance of Agnes: she could not reply to the arguments of Sackville, but her desire of relieving her parents out of her own superfluity still could not be repressed. He watched her looks, and traced the workings of her mind.

"I see," he added, "that you are not yet satisfied. Well, then, I must have recourse to an argument, which I little thought to have required: you may wonder why I did not make use of it at first, but I wished to convince your reason, and I did not like to hurt you unnecessarily, by alluding to the excellent friend that we have lost—I mean your aunt. You may think her decision somewhat harsh, and that, were she now living, she might be induced to act differently ; but this is beyond our knowledge. I can only tell you how she did decide, and I know you will feel that with respect to

the fortune which she left you, her will should be law."

Agnes expressed an earnest assent: Sackville paused for a moment, and then went on.

"Our excellent relation was strongly impressed with the idea of your father's extravagance. She seems to have foreseen that he would become embarrassed; and it was her wish that this misfortune might be caused to fall as lightly as possible on his children. A short time before her death, she spoke to me upon this subject. Her will was then made. I was acquainted with its contents. She spoke, and with deep satisfaction, of the fortune which she had been enabled to leave to you. She then expressed fears of her brother's improvidence, and begged that I would not permit any money to be raised upon the security of your fortune, to be applied to the payment of his debts. I of course promised compliance, for I had no right to oppose her will: but—I don't know how it happened—I think of it now

as a fortunate accident ; I seem to have anticipated the entreaty that I am now exposed to—I told her, that such a refusal on my part, might hereafter seem harsh and invidious, and I begged that I might be provided with authority for my refusal by the expression of her wish in writing. She gave it me. I have it still ; and since it must be so, I will now show it.”

He left the room, and soon returned with the paper, which he put into the hand of Agnes. She recognised her aunt’s hand-writing, and silently regarded it with emotion and respect. She turned away her face to conceal her tears—then restored the paper to Sackville, and said, in a low and broken voice, “I am satisfied,” and the painful subject was then dismissed.

CHAPTER III.

Every wish which leads us to expect happiness somewhere else than where we are, only lays a foundation for uneasiness.

GOLDSMITH.

It was decided that the family should quit Dodswell as soon as possible, and the only question that remained was, where they should go. Retirement was considered a primary object, and various secluded parts of England and the Continent were proposed and rejected in turn. Sackville, who wished to retain them as much as possible within his grasp, and under his eye, until his marriage with Agnes, offered them his own house at Trentford: but, Mr. Morton, whose pride shrunk from the acceptance of such an extent of obligation, refused this offer, as

well as a similar one, that had been made by Lord and Lady Malvern. Sackville then recommended London or its vicinity, and brought forward many plausible arguments in its favour. The health of Lady Louisa, he was very sure, required that she should be in the neighbourhood of good medical advice, an opinion in which she strongly concurred: London, he said, and with some truth, was the best place for solitude and retirement—no where could seclusion be practised more effectually—let them only live out of the way, and show themselves never, or but seldom, in the world, and they might enjoy as complete a seclusion as if two hundred miles divided them from the capital. Then he described so well the meddling, prying curiosity of remote neighbourhoods, and the difficulty of escaping from vulgar intrusion where every one, however insignificant, became an object of attention, that Mr. Morton was soon brought to think that nowhere could he be so effectually concealed from notice as in the metropolis itself.

Thither it was finally determined that the whole family should soon proceed, and Sackville offered to go before them, with the view of obtaining some quiet and humble residence. The yearly allowance of Agnes, and a small income, constituting Lady Louisa's pin-money, were the only funds upon which they could now depend: their large household were all, with the exception of three old servants, obliged to be dismissed; many of them quitted the house long before the departure of the family, and its gloomy air of desertion, which every day became more apparent, added greatly to the misery of its unhappy inmates.

From the moment that the sheriffs' officers had entered the house, the hand of care and attention seemed to have been suspended; and the whole *menage* began to assume a character of confusion and discomfort. The outward signs of those little indefinable elegancies which characterize a well-ordered English country residence, had rapidly begun to vanish; and before

the Mortons had quitted it, Dodswell almost wore the appearance of being deserted. Within the dwelling there was little to relieve its silent gloom, except the melancholy preparations for the departure of the family, and for the approaching sale of the effects; pictures were removed from their places to be marked and registered, and rooms that had often been the scenes of social gaiety, were now converted into comfortless repositories of the collected spoil.

There are few who can withstand the influence of local attachments. Our country, our dwelling, and, above all, the place of our birth, are frequently clung to with an ardour which, though we cannot coolly justify its reasonableness, we find it no less difficult to subdue. We almost act as if we fancied that the inanimate objects from which we part so mournfully, were for a while endued with consciousness, and could participate in our regrets. They recal to our minds past scenes, and former friends; and we view them as relics that are hallowed to our

feelings by the associations which they convey. Many an object intrinsically trifling acquires a value beyond estimation, by circumstances of this nature. Wide, indeed, is the range of cherished recollections that cling around an ancient dwelling, and cruel is the blow that violates such a sanctuary.

At length the day arrived when the Mortons were to quit Dodswell. Distress had never seemed to press so heavy upon them as at that moment : to leave a home even under prosperous circumstances, and with a prospect of return, is melancholy ; and they had neither present happiness nor cheering prospects. It was early on a gloomy morning in February, that the family set out upon their journey. The weather was stormy, and the sighing of the wind, and beating of the rain against their desolate mansion, added not a little to the depressing sights and sounds that encompassed them ; and large patches of unmelted snow, served only to increase,

by their contrast, the wintry blackness of the remainder of the landscape.

Two old servants accompanied the family, who, together with one that had been sent forward to prepare the humble dwelling that awaited them in London, now formed the whole of their reduced establishment; and with heavy hearts the party drove from their own doors. Lady Louisa, and Agnes, and her younger sister, could not refrain from tears of bitter regret. Mr. Morton's strength had seemed almost to fail him as he entered the carriage, and he remained long sunk in silent dejection. They received a few marks of respectful condolence from their humble neighbours; but these demonstrations were rare. The Mortons, unhappily, had not conciliated the good-will of their inferiors, so successfully as that of their superiors and equals. Mr. Morton's manners were naturally haughty; and the people could ill-brook an air of aristocratic pride in one whose ancestors, within the memory of men still living, had

mingled in the rank of the lowest classes. His extravagance, and frequent want of money, had also rendered him far other than a liberal landlord. Lady Louisa wished well to all, and did no harm to any ; but she had never given herself the trouble of doing good.

The spirits of the party gradually improved as they receded from their own neighbourhood, and from scenes which they had so often viewed under happier circumstances. Desirous of change, they looked forward with a sort of melancholy satisfaction, even to their arrival in London, and were glad to trace the first visible effects of its far extended influence.

Of all cities in the world, London, perhaps, extends most widely its influence on the character of the surrounding country, and announces itself to the traveller at the greatest distance. Neither Paris, Naples, nor Vienna, the three cities of Christendom which approach it most nearly in size, can offer any comparison in this respect. They seem to have contributed little

to the territory around them, and to have received little in return : the limits between town and country are clearly defined, and the intercourse between them is comparatively slight : few indications of increasing activity, population, and wealth, meet the observation of the approaching stranger ; and if his eye does not rest upon the roofs and pinnacles of the city, he will be scarcely conscious of its vicinity, till he is stopped by the soldier who demands his passport.

But who that approaches London can fail to note the far extended indications of its mighty presence ? Even in this favoured land in which the general diffusion of civilization and wealth are the happiest and most distinguishing characteristics, even here the change is very evident as we approach the capital. The roads are better, and more thronged ; the fields more carefully tilled ; villas rise around in quicker succession, and the towns have an increasing air of gaiety, activity, and wealth ; greater continually becomes the number, and more eager the haste of

those who hurry to and fro, as if not the mere business of every-day life, but some great event of general interest, was setting all society in motion; houses thicken on either side, at first separate, and far dispersed, then clustering into connected rows—now admitting glimpses of the fields behind them, then at length backed by other buildings, and inclosing you in every direction; till, by degrees, country is found to be lost in town; you are at length beneath the influence of that smoky veil which many hours ago was seen hanging over the distant horizon; and the increasing turmoil, and bewildering movement of a teeming population, soon impel you to the full conviction that you are penetrating the recesses of the modern Babylon.

Few can enter this colossal city without feeling for awhile an oppressive sense of their own comparative insignificance. The most distinguished personages seem shorn of some portion of their consequence, and every one perceives that even to their immediate friends they become

the objects of a less powerful and engrossing interest as soon as they mingle in the maze of London.

This feeling, which is often unpleasantly humiliating, was now soothing and consolatory to the wounded spirits of Mr. Morton. He found in his desolate abandonment by a strange and careless crowd, the truth of that seclusion which Sackville had promised ; and though it was more oppressive than the rural retirement of a remote district, he was comforted in judging it to be more effectual.

The house which Sackville had selected for him was situated in a quarter which, in the flippancy of his more prosperous days, he would have called the Polar regions. It was one of the Alpha Cottages, separated widely from the *soi-disant* habitable part of the west-end by that *impassable* barrier, the New-road. It was a small, melancholy, square building, imbedded in a damp, weedy garden. It retired many yards from the public way, an anomalous mix-

ture of street and road, to which one knows not which name to assign, and commanded no more cheering view than wooden palisades, deformed with bills and chalkings; a gloomy row of high poplars, and, behind these, the comfortless shell of an unfinished range of buildings.

The party entered their humble dwelling with strong feelings of mortification and disgust; and the sight of the comparative wretchedness to which they had so suddenly sunk, caused many tears to Lady Louisa. Agnes tried to make the best of the dreariness of their situation; for she felt that now the time was come when they must feel the stern reality of that poverty which they had hitherto only been anticipating. She endeavoured to impress upon them how little is necessary to comfort when ostentatious feelings are once dismissed. The airiness and quietness of the dwelling were placed in the most favourable points of view, and even the contracted size of the rooms was

made to appear in the light of an advantage; and reasons for being well pleased with the humility of this place of refuge were sedulously and successfully sought.

With the calm energy of unpretending benevolence, she extracted, for the comfort of her dispirited parents, many an unexpected good out of the bitter cup of their afflictions. She presented to them a cheering view whenever circumstances admitted it; and when the flattering prospect was denied, she could lighten the pressure of misfortune by the meek and christian principle of uncomplaining resignation.

CHAPTER IV.

I will stand no more
On other's legs, nor build one joy without me.
If I be ever worth a house again
I'll build all inward ; not a light shall ope
The common outway : no expense, no art,
No ornament, no door will I use there,
But raise all plain and rudely, like a rampire,
Against the false society of men.

CHAPMAN.

WEEK after week rolled on in dull succession, and the Mortons remained in the same state of humble and melancholy seclusion. Their society was almost limited to Sackville and Lord and Lady Malvern. Few of their acquaintance were then in town, and of these, still fewer had discovered the place of their retreat, or took the trouble of coming to see them. Such as did call were seldom received, for Mr. Morton has become timidly sensitive since his distress had

been made public, and shrunk from a meeting with all who were not old friends, or bound to him by the ties of relationship. He exhibited, in this instance, a singular waywardness and contrariety of feeling. Shunning society, and professing, with truth, to be averse to a meeting with any but his most intimate acquaintance, he was still keenly alive to neglect, and seemed constantly haunted with a dread of being forgotten.

He had always been sensitive on this point, but he was much more so now. He was severely galled by a want of attention even in those persons whom he had no desire to see. The sight of a visitor's card could restore him to comparative good spirits; and when day after day had passed, and no friend had come to his door, his spirits visibly sunk, and he would occasionally speak with much bitterness of the ingratitude of the world, and the heartless indifference of society.

Persons in such a situation are somewhat prone to magnify the injustice of the neglect

they suffer. They forget the principles upon which they acted in their days of prosperity, and expect returns which they had previously never anticipated. They paid in tinsel, and seek their late reward in pure and solid ore. They think not that they have been repaid already in the same light coin which they dispensed. Is there a friend for whom they have incurred a sacrifice, on whom they have conferred a lasting benefit? From such let them require the same. But the light interchange of society has given them no such enviable claim. They sought a temporary pleasure, and they gained it; and yet how bitterly can they exclaim against those associates who withhold their notice in the hour of reverse. They talk of ruin magnanimously incurred for the entertainment of those who now desert them. Ruin was in truth incurred; but it was for the gratification of a restless vanity: and, after all, the world, which they call ungrateful, is little more than sternly just.

Among the relations who called upon the

Mortons, and whose visits they received with pleasure, was the young Duke of Swansea. The late duke, Lady Louisa's brother, had never been on terms of cordiality with his sister and her husband; but the present possessor of the title, much to his credit, had not chosen to inherit the uncharitableness of his father. He was a frank, open-hearted young man, unaffected and unspoiled, and hitherto happily insensible to the attempts that had been made to impress him with a high opinion of himself. His abilities, perhaps, barely exceeded the moderate limits of tolerably good sense, and he was, moreover, indolent and careless. Nevertheless, a good disposition, and certain liveliness of manner, had ensured him a great degree of popularity. He was a particular favourite of Lady Louisa, who was quite as proud of her nephew as she was of any of her children.

One of her most favourite speculations was a marriage between him and one of her daughters; and though she could never have been accused

of doing any thing to promote it, she certainly bore it constantly in mind. Lady Malvern, before her marriage, had first been selected as the future duchess: the prospective coronet was next transferred to Agnes; and, now since her unfortunate engagement, it had been destined, by her sanguine mother, for the youthful brow of Marianne. This futile piece of castle-building was now sufficient to occupy and interest the weak and vacant mind of poor Lady Louisa, and a visit from the duke was consequently regarded not merely as the visit of a relation, but as an event upon which hung the favourite project of her life.

One morning the duke called, stayed with them a long time, good humouredly tried to be pleased with the quietness of their situation, which he pretended to believe was chosen out of consideration for Lady Louisa's health, and promised to come and see them frequently. He talked chiefly to Agnes, and seemed much

pleased with her, thereby causing no slight regret to Lady Louisa, who inwardly lamented the engagement, and her nephew's unprofitable waste of admiration on the wrong person. Of Marianne, whom he viewed merely as a child, he took scarcely any notice ; and Lady Louisa, almost felt angry with Agnes for engrossing an attention, by which she could never hope to profit.

The duke scarcely ventured to allude to the present distresses of the family ; but almost the only part of their hardships which he gave any signs of perceiving, was the absence of amusement which it must entail upon Agnes ; and his only act of practical kindness was directed to her. He thought she would like to ride, and wanted very much to lend her a horse, which he was sure would suit her.

“ It will really,” said he, to Lady Louisa, “ be a kindness in my cousin Agnes to take it ; for it carries a lady remarkably well, and would

only be spoiled by being ridden by a man." Agnes, however, had nobody to accompany her, and the offer was declined.

The duke's visit had been a very welcome one to all, and they looked forward with pleasure to the promised repetition of it; but week after week passed on, and he never came. Mr. Morton, whose misfortunes had rendered him keenly susceptible to the slightest shadow of neglect, became very indignant at this want of attention. He wrought himself into a bad opinion, not only of his young relative, but of society in general, and, with the perversity of disappointment, was but too ready to judge, that even those who had hitherto shown no disposition to desert him, would prove equally neglectful in the end. Meanwhile, the duke's omissions were such as he would perhaps have scarcely noticed under happier circumstances, nor must they, in fact, be regarded as proofs of an unfeeling disposition.

The duke, as has been said, was perfectly

good natured, and willing to oblige; but he was also careless, indolent, and forgetful. With him, to be out of sight, was too frequently to be out of mind: he had a large acquaintance; and, with scarcely any pursuit but that of amusement, he fancied that his time was unavoidably very much occupied. Had he once been made to understand that his discontinuance of attention to the Mortons was adding to the sense of their afflictions, he would have been much grieved, and would have hastened to repair his fault. But he had yet to learn the positive ills that may result from mere sins of omission, and that the person who confines his thoughts to the selfish object of pleasing himself, may at the same time, “very innocently,” as he would say, cause considerable pain to others.

The Duke of Swansea had, however, an excuse, which, perhaps, in the opinions of some, may tend to exculpate him entirely. He had become a sudden and ardent admirer of one of the beauties of the day, and his adoration soon

went to the full length of a proposal. He was accepted ; and the matrimonial Alnascharism of poor Lady Louisa was fated to receive its sudden downfall, from the announcement of this event one morning by Lady Malvern.

The Mortons received very frequent visits from Lady Malvern ; but her presence did not often afford them much consolation. She was vain, weak, and frivolous, had no strength of mind, and seemed more oppressed by the sense of their calamities, than they even were themselves. Spoiled by indulgence and prosperity, she rather aggravated their discontent, by overvaluing the importance of the advantages they had lost. She shuddered, with an affectation of overstrained delicacy, at the horrors of their habitation, and wondered how they could exist in such a small ill-furnished house, “ so very, very far from every body.” Her only modes of consolation were, by talking to them as if their situations had remained unchanged, proposing plans which were now unfeasible, and detailing

the tittle-tattle of that gay world from which they were endeavouring to wean themselves. She pressed Agnes to enter into society, brought her invitations, and wished her to allow herself to be chaperoned as usual.

But Agnes resolutely declined mixing in the gaieties of general society. One of her motives was economy, a principle of self-denial, which, with her ample means, she little thought to have been so soon under the necessity of practicing. Her parents had now little to depend upon beyond her yearly allowance, which was all appropriated to their relief, and she had even parted with many valuable trinkets that she might contribute further to their comfort. Under these circumstances it was her object to reduce the expences of the toilette, and abstain as much as she could from that costliness of attire which society would have required.

Lady Malvern could not, or would not, enter into the propriety of these considerations, and thought it strange and ridiculous that the heiress

of thousands should stoop to the practice of such petty parsimony. She had frequent discussions with Agnes, on the subject of her unwillingness to go into society. Agnes thanked her for the kindness which induced her to press it, and assured her that she had no such wish.

“But that is so strange!” said Lady Malvern; “it is not natural at your age, not to wish to go to balls. It is what the world would call odd, and if it is odd it cannot be right.”

“It might be odd,” said Agnes, with a mournful smile, “if there was nothing to warrant my declining; but you must remember the peculiar circumstances in which we are placed.”

“Yes, my dear, I do remember them; but I wish you would not allude to them so often. It is not necessary, and it is very distressing. Besides, things won’t always remain as they are. You know, you have said yourself, that you have hopes of making some arrangement.”

“My fortune is not in my own hands.”

“True, but you are to be married; and then ——”

“It will be my husband’s,” replied Agnes, gravely.

The tone of her remark arrested for a while the train of Lady Malvern’s thoughts. After a short pause, Agnes proceeded—“In the mean time, I wish to share, in every respect, the lot of our parents. They will necessarily be exposed to many privations of former pleasures. Society is among the enjoyments they must give up; and I think they will be more resigned if they see me bearing the same lot as themselves, and (as I hope I shall do) cheerfully. They will feel their misfortunes lighter; and I shall have a better right to comfort them, than if I were exempt from what they are obliged to bear, and could not know by experience how melancholy their situation is.”

“That is very good in you, Agnes,” said Lady Malvern, “and very kindly and properly meant; but, my dear creature, don’t you think it will hurt my father and mother to suppose, (as they certainly must) that they are the means

of debarring you from a great deal of amusement? Besides, if you went into society, you would be better able to entertain them. Think how delightful to return home from a party, and be able to tell them every thing you had seen and heard, and all the inquiries that had been made after them."

"I am afraid," said Agnes, sighing, "there would be little in ball-room inquiries that could give them much pleasure. Even if I amused them at the time, I should do them no kindness in the end. I will take care that they shall never have the pain of supposing that I have been deprived of pleasure by them. They well know that if I give up society, I do it voluntarily."

Lady Malvern was not convinced by the reasonableness of her sister's arguments; but she was struck with the admirable spirit of her self-devotion, and forbore to urge intreaties which she found to be unavailing.

CHAPTER V.

La souveraineté parlementaire n'est au fait que la souveraineté du peuple, sortie du domaine de l'abstraction pour entrer dans celui de la réalité : ou plutôt elle est l'image terrestre de cette souveraineté de la raison à laquelle les hommes rendent hommage lorsque, par une convention salubre, ils donnent force de loi à l'opinion de la majorité, pourvu que cette opinion se légitime en subissant l'épreuve d'une libre et publique discussion.

BARON DE STABL. *Lettres sur l'Angleterre.*

MR. MORTON'S resignation of the contest for Wichcombe was necessarily followed by the election of Lacy ; and almost the whole time, since that event, had been passed by the latter in London, in attending to his parliamentary duties. Lacy entered upon this new career under very favourable expectations. University honours, which had been, hitherto, the highest within his attainment, had shown him to be possessed of talent ; and though it might

reasonably be questioned, whether the objects, when gained, were commensurate with the exertion, they served, at any rate, as a tolerable criterion of his abilities. His talents were also tempered by moderation and a becoming diffidence in the unerringness of his own views. His parliamentary conduct was strictly in conformity with the liberality of his principles. He adhered to no particular party, and felt no magic, in the words, "Whig," or "'Tory;" "Ministry," or "Opposition." Measures, not men, were his object. He saw, in the present organization of the state, the result of a long course of slow and unremitting changes, and he knew no reason why the hand of innovation, which had been hitherto beneficial, should now be arrested. He foreboded no danger to the higher classes, from the increasing education of the lower; and believed that insurrections were more successfully fostered by ignorance than by knowledge. He saw a wide difference between a repeal of catholic disabilities, and an appro-

bation of their tenets; thought them too weak, as a sect, to excite our apprehensions, and too strong, as a people, to be prudently repulsed. He considered, that were their influence such as their opponents believed, too much had been conceded already; and if not, why might not more be safely granted? He trusted that the energies and resources of the country might be best developed by free trade; was not sportsman enough to be blind to the evils of the existing Game Laws; and, though heir to a large landed property, was creditably disposed to listen to reason on the subject of corn.

Though possessed of a respectable share of eloquence, he did not wish to rush hastily into a display of oratory. He knew that the multifarious and weighty business of the House of Commons, did not allow it to be used, like an assembly for amateur debaters, for mere purposes of show or practice. He could not conscientiously speak, unless he had something new or important to say; and his good taste preserved

him, from the commission of florid common-places.

Herbert's parliamentary career brought him into frequent contact with Sackville, who was also the representative of a borough ; and he was enabled, by this means, to form a truer estimate of his character than he had hitherto done. He did not become privy to any instance of corruption in Sackville, or was able to convict him of political profligacy ; but he soon became sensible, that if he was really exempt from such offences, he was preserved by no other principle than prudence. There was an absence of high-mindedness in Sackville, a contempt of public spirit, and a disregard of beneficial measures, except in so far as they could be made subservient to the interests of a party. He delighted in artifice, and was proud of his knowledge of what he called parliamentary tactics. With him, to gull and overreach, were by no means a discreditable exercise of ability. He sympathized with the triumphs of successful

chicanery, and never betrayed indignation or sorrow, on seeing honourable simplicity borne down by the efforts of a dexterous knave. He made a frequent parade of fine sentiments; but it was perceptible to the acute observer, that they came rather from the head than from the heart; and his real bias, inclined him to follow the tortuous paths of cunning.

These characteristics did not escape the quick perception of Lacy. From gratitude to Sackville for an act of deliverance, he felt bound in duty to put a favourable construction upon his words and actions; but he could not refuse to receive the evidence of his observation; and the more he saw of Sackville, the more strongly was he inspired with distrust. The conversation which once passed between himself and Agnes, then came to his recollection, and as her expressions respecting Sackville coincided in a remarkable degree with what he had now experienced, they tended to confirm his unfavourable impressions.

In connection with this train of thought, he remembered the suspicions once dropped by his father, respecting the probable chicanery practised to effect the engagement of marriage with Agnes ; and there were circumstances, connected with other recent events, which almost seemed to justify the belief of some treacherous underhand agency. The suspicions of Lacy were excited, and though he might sometimes mentally condemn them as uncharitable, they were not to be suppressed.

The success of Sackville's attempt to prejudice the mind of Mr. Morton against Lacy, by attributing to the latter a knowledge and approbation of the legal process, had been complete. The idea of Lacy's having plotted against Mr. Morton, was so artfully conveyed by Sackville to that gentleman, that he was not conscious that the first suggestion of it had not proceeded from himself. It was an impression which his former dislike of the Lacys, rendered him very prone to admit ; and the idea being once enter-

tained, Sackville dexterously dropped the character of the instigator, and irritated him by mock defences of his opponent, and feeble hopes that circumstances were not such as he suspected.

At length, when the impression had been sufficiently strengthened by treacherous resistance, he chose a fitting opportunity, and allowed the introduction of those confirmations which he had previously concerted with Allen. They amounted by no means to proofs, but they were so produced, as to have an equivalent effect upon the mind of Mr. Morton. Sackville knew that if any publicity were given to the accusation, Lacy would be able to clear himself, and it was necessary to deprive him of such an opportunity. For this purpose, he again wrought upon the mind of Mr. Morton, whose wayward feelings he could generally rule at pleasure. He impressed him with the impossibility of redress; the humiliation of an acknowledgment that he had been thus over-reached, and the

malicious pleasure with which the world would triumph over the prostrate dupe, and hail the glories of successful treachery. He led Mr. Morton to feel, that it was better to bury his wrongs in his own bosom ; and that as there was no evidence of that sort of unfairness on the part of Lacy which would tend to vitiate the election, his unavailing complaints would only serve to excite the derision of his opponent.

By these means, Sackville at the same time precluded the exculpation of Lacy, and embittered the enmity of Morton ; and the latter made a positive determination, that nothing should induce him to see the man whom he now thought he had such just and ample cause for detesting. Lacy, ignorant of the feelings with which he was regarded, called twice at Mr. Morton's, and was not admitted. The first denial he conceived to be accidental, but having been repulsed a second time, he began to question with himself, whether Mr. Morton objected to society, or had any peculiar grudge

towards him. In this doubt he applied to Sackville. The answer was carelessly given, but it tended to reassure him.

“It must be shyness rather than resentment,” said Sackville. “Why should he bear you any ill will? He can have nobody to thank for what has happened, but himself. The fact is, that his unfortunate circumstances have made him almost a recluse. He is ashamed of his present poverty, and does not like that it should be witnessed.” This seemed a very reasonable explanation, and it was so naturally given, that Lacy saw no ground for distrusting its correctness.

CHAPTER VI.

La ville est partagée en diverses sociétés, qui sont comme autant de petites républiques, qui ont leurs loix, leurs usages, leur jargon, et leurs mots pour rire.

BRUYERE.

AMONG those whom Mr. Morton saw with most repugnance and self-upbraiding, were his humble relations the Bagshawes. They were his equals in family, though not in connection, and were now his superiors in wealth. They now stood almost in the same relative situation to him, in which he once appeared to his less affluent neighbours, and he viewed in them a practical satire on his former self. He felt a strange contrariety of feeling towards them, and hardly knew how they should be treated. His conscience accused him of having slighted

them in his prosperous days; and pride, under the mask of a love of consistency, suggested that it would be hardly becoming to show much friendliness and attention now to those whom he had formerly avoided.

But then, they had once done him a kindness, and were still truly anxious to assist him, and they evinced such genuine good heartedness, and total forgetfulness of all previous slights, that Mr. Morton's pride gave way, and he could not refrain from a gracious reception. It was perhaps fortunate that they were vulgar, for the equilibrium was thereby more than restored. Extractions being equal, Mr. Morton would have had nothing but alliance to set in the scale against the influence of their wealth, if he could not have borne down their vulgarity by the *eclat* of his own refinement. Had they been well-bred people, they might, notwithstanding their plebeian name, have had some chance of mingling slightly in that class of society to which he had been admitted; but,

as it was, their manners rendered it impossible, and his jealousy was thereby appeased. He would on no account have owned, even to himself, that he had thus regarded them in the possible situation of rivals; but, nevertheless, such were his feelings.

Lady Louisa, who troubled her head much less about the Bagshawes, never viewed them in that light. Her consciousness of high and undisputed rank, entirely exempted her from such comparisons. She did not conceive it possible that Mrs. Bagshawe and her daughter should ever quit the character of respectful inferiors, and she was satisfied. She was quite conscious of their vulgarity; but it was not a physical annoyance, and she was not acutely sensible of any others. She had occasionally gone so far as to think it a pity that her husband should have such low relations—but that was more his affair than hers; and it did not appear to her that she had any reason for being violently ashamed of them.

Mr. Bagshawe, since we saw him at Huntley Park, had received a considerable accession of fortune by the death of one of his relations. He had at length resigned the profession of an attorney, which he had been latterly following rather lazily; and, in obedience to the urgent and oft-repeated representations of his wife and daughters, had, early in the spring, quitted the legal quarter of the town, and given up his old neighbours and a good house for a worse and dearer one in Lower Grosvenor-street. He himself was not ambitious of change, and rather regretted it, when he compared the respective comforts of the two residences: but the ladies absolutely refused to stoop to such petty considerations. The situation, they thought, must amply compensate for all inferiority. Within sight of Grosvenor-square, and in the great thoroughfare from thence to Bond-street, even a hovel must be preferable to the best of houses in those regions which have been proclaimed in parliament as

unknown. To Mrs. Bagshawe it seemed like a change of being, and she felt as if every thing that society could offer was now within her reach. Who shall describe the pleasure with which she viewed her new direction ! She was even half sorry that the printer of her visiting card had deprived her of the pleasure of writing it there.

I cannot find that in any other city, ancient or modern, this “pride of place” has acquired such strength as in London. Wonderful is the magic which lies in those words, a “good situation ;” laudable the discrimination of some of its inhabitants. It would be almost possible, with their assistance, to make out a scale of the comparative gentility of the streets and squares. The claims of the latter would be easily settled. St. James’s and Grosvenor-squares would look down like rival potentates from a proud height of dignity on their humbler brethren of Berkeley, Hanover, and Portman ; and these, in return, may discharge their con-

tempt on the minor northern fry of Cavendish, Manchester, Bryanstone, and Montague. But these can still treat others as inferiors. Many and nice are the gradations of square-hood: numerous are its steps of precedence. Even the distant Finsbury, separated from the "world" like ancient Britain, may have neighbours, in that remote and half-discovered region, with whom it may think it "foul scorn" to be classed; and these again may have inferiors, the knowledge of whose existence has not yet travelled westward of the meridian of Charing-cross.

"Tell me your company, and I will tell what you are," says an adage of no mean wisdom; but London would seem to scorn such extensive data, and limits the inquiry to "Tell me your street." At the same time, singular to say, it is almost the only place where vicinity hardly ever produces acquaintance: it would rather seem to repel it; for a next-door neighbour is proverbially unknown. Wherein, then, consists the

mighty magic of situation? In truth we are somewhat insensible to its influence ; but we know that many feel it strongly. Difficult as it may sometimes be to define the peculiar advantages of what is called a good situation, it is easy to trace the feeling which assigns such false importance to these minute and trivial distinctions. Look at the dense throng of London society, and this will furnish the explanation. It is a scene of desperate rivalry, where crowds press on like mariners from a wreck, filling to the utmost the frail boats that are to bear them to the shore, and each feeling that he should be safe if his neighbour were drowned. It is an over crowded arena, where advancement is open to all who choose to struggle for it. There are no broad, impassable lines of demarcation ; nothing that compels the aspirant to despair of admission to any extent of social honours : every claim, however trivial, may conduce to the desired success : and the pretensions of each individual are

often made up of a number of particulars, too insignificant to be separately considered. Thus the resources of vanity are taxed to the utmost; and he who can assert no other superiority over his immediate rivals, who are running with him the race of society, will probably discover that—he lives in a better situation.

The Bagshawes, in their migration, did but follow the feeling of the million; but they (and principally the lady) had augured too much from the happy transition. Mrs. Bagshawe seemed to have thought that their change of neighbourhood would necessarily be followed by a change of society: but she had not sufficiently considered that there is no neighbourhood in London; and two months had passed without any flattering results. She looked wistfully at the Court Guide, where she saw with pleasure their homely name figuring in the list by the side of titles; but she found that she was quite as far from any acquaintance with these personages as when two miles of

building lay between them. Knockers were plied to the right and left: but such tantalizing peals seldom thundered at her door; and though the progress of her carriage at night was often checked by the throngs that flocked to neighbouring routs, she was not a whit the more invited. She also saw less than formerly of her old acquaintance in the distant quarter that she had quitted. She questioned herself whether she had been guilty of any neglect, and feared, in the simplicity of her heart, that her friends might accuse her of growing "fine." But they had not paid her the compliment of so unmerited a suspicion. She had gained nothing in their eyes by her migration; and if they now called upon her less frequently, it was for this plain reason, that she was farther out of their way.

The house to which the Bagshawes now most willingly bent their course was that of the Mortons. Pity for their misfortunes produced a greater friendliness of disposition towards

them, and they felt a good-natured pleasure in paying them attention. A disciple of Rochefoucault might perhaps have discovered that there was something in the misfortunes of the Mortons that was not entirely displeasing to them; and it might also be suggested that they hoped to profit by their relations' long acquaintance with the fashionable world. But it is an ungracious task to extract the little selfish alloy that links within the golden promise of a praiseworthy action.

Civility's last best vent in London is always an invitation to dinner. Routs and balls are for bowing acquaintance; but a dinner is the pledge of intimacy. As such the Bagshawes viewed it; and as such they proposed it to the Mortons. Their proposal, however, had been twice made without success. Lady Louisa pleaded ill health, and Mr. Morton had an insuperable objection to stirring from home. At length, during the Easter recess, Tom Morton being come up from Oxford, and Mr. Bagshawe's

“eldest hope” from Cambridge, it was suggested, that perhaps Miss Morton would not object to accompany her brother, and dine in Lower Grosvenor-street. It was a proposal that was not much liked either by Agnes or her parents; but a wish to avoid giving offence to the Bagshawes induced them to comply.

CHAPTER VII.

Cette fatuité de quelques femmes de la ville, que cause en elles une mauvaise imitation de celles de la cour, est quelque chose de pire que la grossièreté des femmes du peuple, et que la rusticité des villageoises : elle a sur toutes deux l'affectation de plus.

BRUYERE.

ON the appointed day, at a late hour (for the Bagshawes, thinking lateness fashionable, determined to be correct in that at least), Agnes and her brother repaired to Lower Grosvenor-street. They were very cordially received: Mr. Bagshawe exerted his best powers of speech to give the welcome; and his lady, glowing under a large red turban, as gorgeous as a full blown peony, squeezed the small white fingers of Agnes, between her own fat hot hands, and dragged her off to the fire-side. She then introduced her im-

mediately to a heavy-looking elderly couple of the name of Jones, who were said to have remembered seeing her when, as Mrs. Bagshawe said, exemplifying by action, she was “not *so high*.”

Who among our readers, lately arrived at womanhood, or manhood, will not sympathise with Agnes? Few of the minor miseries that wait on introductions are more annoying than the being presented, or rather exhibited, to under-bred people who had seen you when you were a child. Topic and interest are all on their side; and you, the unhappy presentée, have nothing to say, and little to feel, except the oppressive difficulty of being sufficiently grateful for the extent of their memory, and the curiosity with which they regard you. Then come the personal observations—the growth—the likeness—and the alteration—and the “never should have known you;” or the assurances of instantaneous recognition; to neither of which remarks have you any thing to reply; and the good

people con you over as unceremoniously as if you were still the child they left you, and seem almost surprised to find that you behave like a grown up person.

All this did Agnes undergo from Mr. and Mrs. Jones; a Mr. and Mrs. Jones whom she was not conscious of having ever seen before, and of whose history she knew nothing. She envied her brother for having "bloomed unseen" in his days of childhood, and for his present exemption from all recognition. In consideration of her own distresses, she could hardly feel inclined to reprove the repulsiveness of his bow to them, and the abruptness with which he turned away from them to talk to Richard Bagshawe, whom half a year passed at Cambridge, since we met him last at Huntley Park, had in some degree tended to improve.

College life was a topic of common interest to the two young men, and they began to discuss the comparative merits of the sister Universities. The conversation that ensued might have astonished

an uninitiated listener, who should expect to hear English flowing, in its utmost purity, from the lips of two students fresh from these celebrated seats of learning. But the English of their halls and combination-rooms bears too often a comparative purity with the Latin of the schools. Universities have their shibboleth, as well as the Ring. These two young men were both in their freshman's year, and were rather unnecessarily proud of their newly-acquired jargon. They talked of men with whom they had *wined*; the factious struggles of "Town" and "Gown;" the necessary evils of "scouts" and "gyps;" "battles," meaning those of the buttery; and "commons," not the third estate, but of that kind which are sometimes called short. Then spake they of their studies. The Cantab ridiculed a Johnian, who *muzzed* hard the last term for a Senior *Op.*, that he might stand for *the* medal, but only got a *wooden spoon*; and the Oxonian calmly reproved the presumption of a man who had

taken up the Poets for his “ Little go,” and, after all, was *under the line*. The administration of justice was compared. The case was cited of a Brazen-Nose man who was threatened with *rustication* for merely *cutting* hall and chapel ; and the sister University supplied an instance of one who was *put out of sizings and commons* for refusing to *cap* the dean. Various other cases were produced and compared, including crimes not mentioned in the Decalogue, and punishments the names of which are not to be found in Johnson’s dictionary.

While this classical dialogue was taking place, Mrs. Bagshawe, who had made Agnes fully acquainted with Mr. and Mrs. Jones, was entertaining all three with full particulars respecting the purchase of their present house. Its conveniences, appurtenances, lease, ground rent, and former possessor, all had their places in her narration ; and the detail might have been wire-drawn to a still greater length, if her attention had not been suddenly directed to the

more interesting subject of her neighbours. The second Miss Bagshawe, who had been amusing herself with looking out of the window, broke in upon her tale by exclaiming aloud that Lord John Wharton was just returning from his morning ride.

“Dear me, how late he is!” said Mrs. Bagshawe, with all the interest of an intimate acquaintance. “But he is generally late; and which horse is he riding, Lucy? Is it the grey or the black?”

“The bay,” said Miss Lucy, who seemed to have been a critical observer of Lord John’s horses.

“I am sorry it isn’t the grey,” said her mother, “that Mrs. Jones might have taken a look at it. His lordship rides a charming grey horse sometimes, Ma’am. He is a very elegant young man, is Lord John; and Lady Jane, his sister, is a very elegant young woman. She goes out a riding too. They live close by at their father’s house, the Marquis of Northal-

lerton's, next door but one, Ma'am, and that is the reason we see so much of them."

"You are acquainted with them, then?" said Agnes.

"Why," said Mrs. Bagshawe, with a slight degree of hesitation, "we know them very well — by sight; but I cannot exactly say that we know them, at present, to speak to; but some of our servants are quite intimate with some of the marquis's people, and we see and hear a good deal of them, one way or another."

Agnes felt more inclined to blush than smile at the rude notion which poor Mrs. Bagshawe evidently entertained, that the intimacy of the servants in the respective households, should be likely to promote the acquaintance of the masters; and she feared lest her deep-dyed vulgarity should be too apparent even to the dull perceptions of Mr. and Mrs. Jones. But one glance at their sober countenances was sufficient to reassure her, and she earnestly hoped

that no person of a more sensitive temperament might be added to the party.

At this moment, Mr. Bagshawe pulled out his watch, said something, with an air at once waggish and complaining, of its being "half past dinner-time, and time to dine again," and added, that he hoped Mr. Lacy would not prove himself Mr. *Lazy*, but would soon favour them with his presence. Agnes quite forgot to pay to this inimitable pun, the expected compliment of a smile, in her surprise at the very unwelcome recurrence of such a name, and she found upon inquiry that it was the very Mr. Lacy whom, under present circumstances, she was most unwilling to meet. In addition to her natural reluctance to see the vulgarity of her relations, the Bagshawes, exposed to his discriminating eye, she had many other reasons for wishing to avoid him. Bound as she was to Sackville, to whom she could feel no attachment, she did not wish to be exposed to the society of him whom she so strongly preferred.

The recent misfortunes of her family had made her shrink from the first collision with every person who had known them in happier days, and above all, she had been taught to consider Lacy as the secret cause of their late misfortunes. It was Sackville's aim to prejudice her mind, no less than her father's, and he had not been utterly unsuccessful. She earnestly wished to think the accusations untrue; but she had nothing to oppose to those circumstances which Sackville seemed anxious rather to conceal and palliate, than to exaggerate or obtrude. Both in obedience to her father's wishes, and out of charity towards Lacy, she had abstained from mentioning the mischievous interference of which he was suspected. She longed to hear his vindication, but she knew not how to obtain it, for it was difficult to inform him of the feelings with which he was regarded by her father, without incurring the danger of another hostile meeting. Her father's irritability had been increased by his misfortunes; and previous occurrences had

led her to fear that an angry altercation might terminate as seriously as before.

She therefore considered it the part of prudence, to withhold from Lacy all information of the charges which had been brought against him; but at the same time to try to discover how far he was conscious of having merited an injurious accusation. Scarcely had she decided how to receive him, than a carriage was heard to stop at the door—then a knocking—then footsteps on the stairs, and Lacy was announced.

After accosting Mr. Bagshawe, who met him at the door, Lacy's eyes were naturally directed first towards the lady of the house, and it was not until he had exchanged a few sentences with her, that he looked round at the rest of the company. Then it was that, turning from Mrs. Bagshawe with the intention of bestowing a bow of acknowledgment on her daughters, he first became sensible of the presence of Agnes. He almost started when he saw her, and visibly changed colour; and surprise and embarrass-

ment were apparent in his countenance. Agnes perhaps looked more composed ; but her heart beat violently, and she felt as if she could hardly breathe.

There was much passing in the minds of each that must tend to render this meeting agitating and painful. The duel, the election, Lacy's engagement to Miss Hartley, and the discovery of Mr. Morton's embarrassment, had all taken place since the last time that they had even seen each other, and each of these circumstances brought with it a long train of agitating thoughts. The last time they had met, except in the midst of crowds, was on the morning after the ball at Westcourt, and in that interview they had allowed their mutual sentiments to escape, and had uttered words that could not be recalled or forgotten. They were each conscious of the necessity that existed for repressing all indication of what they felt, and of intrenching themselves behind the defences of frigid politeness, and the safest common-place.

It seemed difficult to avoid subjects possessing any degree of interest to either, that might not endanger their mutual composure. Inquiries after Mr. Morton and Lady Louisa were timidly made by Lacy, and very briefly answered by Agnes. Sackville's was an interdicted name, as well as that of Miss Hartley. Lord and Lady Malvern might more safely be approached, but a conversation beginning with them had led somehow or other to the Applebys at whose house Lacy and Agnes had first met. They talked to each other as if it were a duty, a penance, which, however unwilling, they were bound to perform. To Lacy, it would have seemed a sort of sacrilege to turn his attention from Agnes to any other person, and he had not the power to quit her side, though conscious that he wished it.

But Agnes herself dispelled the painful charm that held him. Her brother was standing near him, and she begged to introduce him to Lacy, and the latter then talked to him till

dinner was announced. Neither Agnes nor Lacy wished to be near each other at table. Agnes accepted, with more pleasure than she could ever have expected, the arm of Mr. Jones ; and Lacy, in spite of Mrs. Bagshawe's hints to him to "take Miss Morton," persisted in offering his services to the lady of the mansion. They succeeded in being far asunder, and were as widely separated as was possible. They were even favoured in their object, by the unnecessary size of the table, and two blanks left by defaulting guests, whose absence Mr. Bagshawe feelingly deplored.

Agnes had been too much occupied by the many reflections which Lacy's presence had conjured up, to think with uneasiness of the impression which the vulgarity of her relations was likely to make upon him. It must, however, be said in justice to the Bagshawes, that they appeared to much greater advantage at their own table than elsewhere, and that their entertainment was rather creditable, and served

very tolerably, to support the pretensions which they thought suitable to their new abode. Their plate looked as well as if it had been a hundred years in the family, and their cook had given them as good a dinner as if they had been fashionables of the first distinction. The "pomp and circumstance" of polite society are too much at the command of wealth, to be denied to the monied vulgar; and, consequently, those who seek for characteristic distinctions must generally look for them rather in the persons themselves than in their tables and establishments.

The present scene suggested a similar thought to Lacy when he was addressed by Mrs. Bagshawe, who asked him to take "a few *grass*" (meaning asparagus) with his chicken. Conversation had not entirely slumbered. Mr. Bagshawe had enlivened his end of the table by firing off, very successfully, a favourite joke upon a saddle of mutton.

"Mr. Jones, do you like it cut saddle-wise, or bridle-wise?" said the wily Mr. Bagshawe.

“Saddle-wise, if you please,” said the unsuspecting Mr. Jones.

“I like it cut bridle-wise,” was the prompt reply, “for then I am sure to have a *bit* in my mouth.”

After some reflection, Mr. Jones rewarded the punster with a hearty laugh, and ended by protesting that he had never heard that joke before. Mr. Jones was no joker, but he did his best, in his way, to be entertaining and instructive. He was one of those persons who have a genius for doubting; and he favoured the company with many indications of his peculiar talent. He doubted whether the world was grown wiser: whether Macadamization would succeed in streets: whether the Whigs would ever come into office: whether popery was not as dangerous as ever: and whether such a town as London had any right to an university.

Meanwhile Mrs. and Miss Bagshawe had been ranging with Lacy through the classic

land of Italy. They had been at Florence, Rome, and Naples; and though they could not talk of their “Raphaels, Correggios, and stuff,” so fluently as Mr. Bagshawe, they had much to say on the society, scenery, and accommodations.

“We were at *Room*, Mr. Lacy,” said Mrs. Bagshawe. “I suppose you have been there. Every body goes to *Room* now-a-days. It is a delightful place in the season. To my mind it is as good as Bath or Cheltenham every bit—only there are no waters to drink—it does not come up to them there to be sure.”

“That is very true,” said Lacy, suppressing a smile with some difficulty. “I had never considered that. What then do you think can be the reason why so many from our country go there?”

“I suppose they go for the ceremonies,” replied Mrs. Bagshawe. “Dear heart! what a sight of ceremonies there are! We made a point of going to them all. You know the saying,

Mr. Lacy, ‘Do at *Room* as they do at *Room*.’ And so, as I said, we made a point of going to all the ceremonies. We saw horses blessed, and lambs blessed, and palm trees, and candles, and I don’t know what besides ; and we saw a doll carried round the Harry Scaly Church, with drums and trumpets playing before it, like anything, and go out and bless the people. What a deal of blessing there is there ! As Mr. Bagshawe used to say, it is a blessed place altogether. But the Holy Week ! that was the finest thing of all : and I believe I may safely say that I went through every bit of it. I cannot think now how I bore it ; but I believe I am pretty tough. A gentleman said to me, ‘Ma’am, you must have the strength of a horse,’ and I don’t believe it was merely a compliment. Really there used to be terrible crowding and squeezing sometimes. Eliza, do you remember the day when the Pope waited at table upon those pilgrim people ? What work we had to get to see him ! There was a little box, like a pen for

poultry, stuck up in the middle of the room, and I knew it was the best place for seeing, so up I went. Somebody told me it was meant for the grandees. ‘Oh!’ says I, ‘a fig for your grandees—I am not come all this way to be put about by them!’ So on we pushed—didn’t we, Eliza? I didn’t see any thing after all; but I *did* get in, I will say *that*.”

Eliza, whose disposition seemed less enterprising than her mother’s, said, with a languid air, that she doubted whether they had been repaid for their exertions. “What I enjoyed most,” said she, “were our parties of pleasure.”

“Oh, yes, the parties of pleasure,” said Mrs Bagshawe. “I shall never forget that night at the Coliseum. We went there by moonlight, Mr. Lacy, and took a cold collation with us, and had our supper, quite comfortable; and a very merry party we were. Eliza, do you remember Mr. Sharp carrying off a bottle of soda water into one of the dark passages, and making the cork fly, and groaning, to make us think that

somebody had shot himself? And then his telling us all about the banditti coming down and hiding themselves there? And then you know, you and Miss Spratt went to look for an echo, and Dick, a rogue, stole round the other way and made one; and when you hallooed, he hallooed, and when you clapped your hands, he clapped his hands. I have laughed many a good time since with thinking of that scheme of Dick's. Dick, we were talking about you. Do you remember what fun you had at the Coliseum?"

"Ay, precious good fun," said Dick, and went on eating as before.

"It is a curious place, that Coliseum," pursued Mrs. Bagshawe, turning again to Lacy. "If you ever observed, Mr. Lacy, they have built up that outer wall afresh at the two ends. I doubt whether they will ever be able to finish it all round. They generally do things by halves in Italy."

"But, mamma, it is a ruin," interposed

Miss Bagshawe; “you know it was never meant to be finished.”

“Well—true—I suppose it was not. I cannot say that I am very partial to ruins. I don’t think many of them are very ornamental. Some folks are very fond of them. What is your taste, Mr. Lacy?”

“The more perfect a building is, the better I like it,” said Lacy.

“Well, that is precisely my way of thinking,” continued Mrs. Bagshawe, pleased at the supposed accordance of their tastes. She then proceeded to touch upon the society of Rome and other Anglo-Italian cities, and afforded Lacy a good deal of amusement by the peculiarity of her views, and the many strange anecdotes with which her remarks were interlarded. They might, perhaps, have afforded amusement to some of *our* readers, but a taste for personality is too much the literary vice of the day; and we do not wish to indulge the growing

mania even by giving insertion to Mrs. Bagshawe's *on-dits*.

Dinner at length was ended, and so was the sedentary conclave held by the gentlemen afterwards, one of those reverential tributes to the wisdom of our ancestors, which we trust the good sense and sobriety of the present age will soon induce it to discontinue.

Lacy left the dining-room with a strong desire to engage Agnes again in conversation. Her presence seemed to give him pain, and yet there was an attraction in it, which he could not resist, and much had occurred to his mind during their separation at the dinner table, which he now wished to say. He thought he perceived in her manner a more than necessary degree of reserve, and he longed to penetrate the motives, and discover what were the feelings with which she really regarded him.

The experiment was difficult and hazardous, considering their respective situations. But at

the moment he thought not of that, but merely of the indulgence of what seemed a reasonable curiosity. Some arrivals had been heard during the stay of the gentlemen in the dining-room ; and Lacy trusted that this influx might favour his object, and enable him to escape more easily from the clutches of Mrs. and Miss Bagshawe.

On entering the drawing-room, he found many fresh visitors ; and after undergoing one or two introductions at the hands of Mrs. Bagshawe, he looked round for Agnes. But unhappily he found her quite unapproachable, closely hemmed in by other ladies, so that he could have said nothing to her above a whisper that would not have been audible to the whole coterie. He also unguardedly came within the influence of Mrs. Bagshawe's notice, and was again compelled to talk and listen to her.

She began upon the subject of music, preparatory, as it afterwards appeared, to a performance by Miss Bagshawe. " I was thinking,

Mr. Lacy," said she, "whether I had ever seen you at the Opera."

Lacy believed not, having never had the pleasure of meeting her there.

"Why, no," said Mrs. Bagshawe; "and indeed, at present, you would not know where to look for us; for the fact is, we have no regular box. I believe we must have one next season; and, indeed," pursued she, putting on a prudent face, and endeavouring to mask the loftiness of her aspirations under the plea of a little economy, "I am not sure that it would not be the cheaper way, if one is to go to the Opera much, for boxes are *ris* of late, and there is no end of dabbling about, now a box here, and now a box there, and one is never settled and comfortable. What do you advise, Sir?"

"To take a box for the season," said Lacy, "if you prefer it."

"Well, I am sure I am glad to hear you think so. We cannot come on without the

Opera no how. I hope you like Madame Pasta, Sir. I cannot agree with any body that does not like Madame Pasta. I only wish she would not stick so to her Italian. I do long to hear her sing a right good English song. Why cannot she give us ‘God save the King,’ and ‘Rule Britannia,’ now and then, like Madame Catalani? Are you partial to English songs, Sir?”

Lacy said he was.

“Eliza, Mr. Lacy, likes English songs : cannot you sing us one or two? There is a song I used to sing—‘Tell me, bubbling echo, why.’ ”

“*Bubbling* echo,” said Miss Bagshawe.

“It used to be ‘bubbling’ in my book,” said her mother; “but never mind the words, only sing it.”

But the young lady remonstrated, and said she could not sing English music; she had not learnt the style; she was only equal to the easy cadences of Rossini; and, accordingly, she sat down, and trilled away at an air out of ‘Semi-ramide.’

The air was well chosen, being a noisy one, and consequently imposing no check upon conversation. Soft plaintive airs are decidedly most prejudicial to the interests of general society. They produce attention, spread an awful sense of decorum over the company, and lull them gradually into silence. They are a shameful infringement upon the liberty of the tongue—whereas nobody is afraid to chatter under the cover of a spirited bravura.

The music had caused a movement in the room. Those who were tired of their neighbours took advantage of the opportunity to change their places; and among these was Agnes. Lacy was attentive to the opportunity which these new arrangements might give him. He saw a vacant seat by the side of that which Agnes had taken, and he immediately occupied it.

“I am sorry,” said he, lowering his voice so as to be heard only by her, “not to have had the pleasure of seeing Mr. Morton since our

meeting at the election. I hope he knows that I took the liberty of calling upon him twice."

"My father knows it," replied Agnes; "and if he has not acknowledged your civility, I hope you can excuse him. You know our present circumstances—I need not try to disguise them—they have depressed him a good deal, and made him rather averse to society, and less attentive to form than before."

"I can easily imagine it," said Lacy; "but I hope you will not think that I was induced to speak by any foolish stickling for ceremony. Pray, if you can, give Mr. Morton to understand that I shall not wish to draw him into any sort of return. Perhaps I ought to apologize for having ventured to intrude; but we met last as opponents. It was that circumstance which made me anxious to see him."

"Had you, then, reason to suppose that he would bear you any ill will?" said Agnes.

"God forbid!" replied Lacy; "nor do I

see any foundation for such an idea. The contest was conducted with as little warmth as was possible ; and we shook hands on the day of our last meeting. But still, we were opponents ; and, having so met, I was desirous of seeing him again. Do not, however, suppose that I am inclined to press it. Only tell me that you think a visit would be considered intrusive, and I will abstain for the future."

Agnes looked perplexed.

"I am not authorized," said she, "to tell you any thing of the kind ; but I hope you will not be offended if I give you my own impressions. They are, that my father, under present circumstances, had rather not see you. He scarcely allows himself to be visible to any but his particular friends."

She turned away her head after she had said this, as if wishing to put a stop to the conversation ; and presently rose and walked to the instrument. She soon afterwards made her departure, without having afforded Lacy any

further opportunity of addressing her ; and he himself, having then lost the only object which made the party tolerable to him, presently followed her example.

CHAPTER VIII.

True virtue is like precious odours—sweeter the more incensed and crushed.

BACON.

LACY felt, with sorrow, that his former, and now hopeless, attachment to Agnes, was strongly awakened by the past interview. He had seen her in a new point of view, and one in which she was especially calculated to interest his feelings. He looked back to the period when she first won his affections. He remembered how the brilliant fascination of her beauty had been heightened by the elegant vivacity of her manners, and the playful spirit of her conversation. These were now absent ; but, in their place, there was a dignified, yet plaintive composure, a

charm which the hand of sorrow had softened rather than dimmed, and which seemed to make her image sink still deeper into his heart. Like the calm and mournful beauty of a moonlight scene, it possessed a more enchaining interest than all the sunny blaze of her former attractions. Something might, perhaps, be attributed to the circle in which he met her. He thought he was seeing her to a disadvantage; but he was mistaken. The effect of contrast only rendered her natural elegance more conspicuous.

There was a superiority about Agnes which was strongly felt by the Bagshawes, and never so much as now. Miss Bagshawe, with all those uneasy aspirations after elegance and fashion, which, in half-bred people, are apt to lead to affectation, was tolerably quick and observant. She had long since entertained a jealous sense of the superior refinement of her cousin; but at that time Agnes had great advantages in point of society and connections, and had been raised upon a pedestal of fashion

which precluded any thing like a fair comparison; and Miss Bagshawe could be comforted by the reflection that, but for these adventitious aids, the superiority might be very doubtful; and that, if places had been changed, the scale might even turn in her favour. But now the anticipated change was almost made. *They* were in possession of increased affluence, and living in a fashionable quarter, while the Mortons were depressed to poverty, and buried in the homely seclusion of the Alpha Cottages. Agnes had renounced society, and had never in her conversation made any allusion to the gaieties of the season. Miss Bagshawe, though never seen at parties that were at all of a select description, had made good use of her eyes at the Park, at the Opera, and at a crowded charity ball, which she had attended the week before, and had gained a tolerable knowledge of the exterior of most persons of distinction, and could talk about them almost as fluently as if they were her intimate acquaintance. She had

noticed several remarkable flirtations—could tell how Lady Such-a-one looked—knew, by sight, most of the patronesses for the last fancy ball, and could mention what ladies belonged to such and such quadrilles—was *au fait* on the subject of what was or what was not worn at present, and could support her opinion, in case of need, by citing the example of the Duchess of So-and-so. She had also been abroad, while Agnes had not. In short, she now seemed to have many advantages over her cousin, and to be in every respect qualified—aided, as she was, by costlier attire—to be the more brilliant person of the two.

Yet all this availed her nothing. The superiority was still as conspicuous as before ; and it was the more striking because it seemed to be preserved unconsciously, and without effort. That Agnes should be able to renounce and disregard all to which Miss Bagshawe was hopelessly aspiring, was also a reflection that conveyed a strong and humiliating sense of the real

distance which still existed between them. But her admiration of Agnes was no longer blended with envy of her superior advantages; on the contrary, pity for her present trials served to convert it into generous regard.

Lacy's parting interview with Agnes was not entirely satisfactory, though there was perhaps nothing in her words to which he could attach an unpleasant import. He was disquieted, less by what she said than by what she had failed to say. There was also a measured coldness, a careful selection of phrase, differing widely from her usual address, an unwillingness to re-assure him, and a chilling reserve of manner, which induced him to surmise that in the domestic circle of the Mortons his name was not received as one of happy omen.

These thoughts pursued him long after he had quitted the presence of Agnes. With a view to satisfy his mind, he called upon Mr. Bagshawe, whom he knew to have frequent communication with the Mortons. He spoke

to him in a confidential tone ; he mentioned the long period of coolness which had existed between the families ; the duel with Mr. Morton ; their opposition at the election ; Mr. Morton's present unwillingness to see him ; and the irritable nature of his disposition. He then stated his own fears lest that gentleman should conceive himself to have any sufficient grounds for ill will, and indulge his former feelings of dislike. He entreated him to discover, as delicately as he could, whether any such feelings existed, and assured him that in so doing he might consider himself as acting the part of a mediator between them.

Mr Bagshawe, who, in spite of his affectation and pompous airs in society, had a good deal of shrewdness, which had been sharpened by his legal practice, entered readily into Lacy's ideas, and promised to do his best to set his mind at ease upon the point in question. It was undoubtedly Lacy's attachment to Agnes, excited anew by their late meeting, which rendered him so sen-

sitively solicitous of the good opinion of her family, and so easily wounded by her apparent coldness. He dared not own his sentiments even to himself, plighted as he now was to another. Led away by the generosity and delicacy of his feelings, which, during a period of illness, had been so unfairly wrought upon, to engage himself to one whom he could not love, he had often bitterly regretted the fancied necessity of his sacrifice. Time and cool observation had also rendered him somewhat sceptical as to the extent of that attachment which Miss Hartley was supposed to feel for him. Still nothing had occurred which warranted a breach of the engagement ; and though the parting, when he went up to London after the election, had been conducted with a very philosophical spirit of composure, they had since that time maintained the proprieties of correspondence with sufficient regularity, and had contrived to write more tenderly than they had ever found it possible to speak.

The motives by which Lacy and Agnes were each of them led to dispose of their hands in opposition to their affections, were, viewed as sacrifices, certainly meritorious ; but they involved an infringement of obligations, perhaps higher than those which they were then regarding. The marriage vow is a solemn engagement to “love and honour ;” and it may be questioned whether, under any circumstances, of however urgent a nature, it can properly be entered into by those who feel a distrust of their own ability to fulfil its important injunctions.

But this balance of duties is too nice and difficult to be settled satisfactorily by any but the calm observer. They who are themselves interested in the result, are ever liable to be swayed by feeling, rather than by judgment ; and their errors, if they are not of the heart, must be treated with comparative leniency by those who, with the best intentions, may still be weak and erring as themselves.

One morning, about a week after Lacy's

meeting with Agnes, he received a visit from Mr. Bagshawe, who came to tell him the result of an interview with Mr. Morton. After tantalizing Lacy for some time, with a wordy account of the adroitness with which he brought the conversation to turn upon him, he proceeded to unfold the state of Mr. Morton's sentiments.

Here Lacy stopped him. "Excuse my interruption," he said; "but I beg that you will let me first assure you, that I have no wish to hear anything that has been mentioned by Mr. Morton under the pledge of secrecy. I am certain that you can have no intention to commit any such breach of confidence: I do not, therefore, speak with reference to you, but with a view to clear myself. I could not bear that you should, by possibility, conceive that my intentions were less honourable, than I am sure your conduct will be."

Mr. Bagshawe assured him that he was bound by no pledge to withhold anything that he was

now going to mention. He then stated that he had found great displeasure to exist against him in the mind of Mr. Morton; and that the cause of this, was a belief that the execution of the writ had been an electioneering measure, timed by his direction, so as to trouble and defeat the opposite party; that the suing creditor was the brother-in-law of one of the Wichecombe burgesses, who was most warm in his opposition to Mr. Morton; and that a letter had been seen by Mr. Morton, which proved the existence of a plot against him, and Lacy's participation in it.

Mr. Bagshawe could not learn more than that such a letter existed. It was not in Mr. Morton's possession; and that gentleman would not tell to whom it had been written, or in whose hands he had seen it.

Lacy was astonished, and shocked to find himself considered guilty of so gross a piece of treachery. The circumstance of the letter also threw a more unpleasant light upon the subject,

and seemed to indicate that his own character had been deliberately undermined. He knew that no letter existed which could, with any truth, tax him even with a previous knowledge of the execution which was hanging over Mr. Morton ; and it was therefore evident, that the one alluded to had been prepared with a malicious intention.

How to clear himself was now the question. He first thought of requiring from Mr. Morton a distinct statement of the charges against him, and the foundations on which they rested ; but it occurred to him, that this demand might possibly be refused ; and as a serious quarrel would then be the inevitable consequence, he resolved to dispense with this measure, until he had previously tried more cautious and less obtrusive methods of justification.

In the prosecution of these, we must now leave him, and direct our attention to other circumstances which were occurring in the meantime.

CHAPTER IX.

Throughout the world, if it were sought,
Fayre words ynoughe a man shall fynde :
They be good chepe, they cost right nought,
Their substance, it is only wynde ;
But well to say, and so to meane,
That swete accord is seldome sene.

SIR T. WYATT.

EASTER was now come. No amelioration appeared in the circumstances of the Mortons ; and Agnes, who had hoped that time would render her parents more reconciled to their situation, was doomed in this to be disappointed. The first shock of their distress had made them indifferent to many minor points of comfort ; and they had steeled themselves to the necessity of bearing even more than they had to endure, and secretly gloried in their

petty heroism. But these feelings had subsided ; they had leisure to review their wants, and contrast their present with their former life ; and, day after day, they appeared more desirous to forget their poverty, and do as they were accustomed.

It was the task of Agnes to recal them to prudence and resignation ; and a melancholy task it was, especially for one who, like her, had almost within her grasp the means of making their existence so much more endurable. She read in their countenances the belief of her power to assist them. She began to reproach herself for not having used sufficient exertions, and resolved to apply once more to Sackville. She had already been assured by him, that to apply any part of her fortune to the payment of her father's debts, would be a violation of the wishes of her deceased aunt. But it did not, she thought, necessarily follow from thence, that she was forbidden to administer to her parents' comfort ; and she trusted that something

out of the accumulating surplus income, over and above her yearly allowance, might be granted her for that purpose. In strict justice, to pay the debts would be a more honourable employment of the money, than to devote it to the pleasures of him who had contracted them ; but it was not likely that Agnes, full of the griefs of her parents, should take this severe view of the case.

It was about a week before the dinner at the Bagshawes, that Agnes first made her application to Sackville. He heard her with an air of sincere interest, and professed to enter warmly into her feelings. He said that what she required was not impossible, but that there were difficulties which stood in the way of it. Such a measure required the concurrence of both the trustees ; and, however willing he himself might be to assist her, there was no prospect of Mr. Hawksworth agreeing to any thing of the kind. " But," said Sackville, " there are other means of obtaining what you require."

Agnes eagerly intreated him to adopt them.

“Most willingly,” replied he, with a smile.
“I shall want only your consent.”

He paused for a moment, looked earnestly at her anxious countenance, approached nearer to her, and proceeded. “Your aunt, whose memory, I am sure, will ever be dear to both of us, provided in her will that the whole income of the fortune she left you, should pass into your hands, not simply on your arriving at the age of twenty-four, but even previously, in case of the occurrence of an event, which I think I hardly need recal to your mind. It is your marriage, my dear Agnes, which will give you the fullest power of relieving the distresses of your parents. Then you will be at liberty to contribute more fully to their happiness; and I need not speak of the happiness which you will confer upon your fortunate husband, who, I am sure, will have a sincere pleasure in joining his humble endeavours to restore your father and Lady Louisa to the station which is their right.

There is only one person, to whom I cannot venture to say that this expedient would be acceptable or advantageous, and that is yourself. To the others I will not scruple to say, that your immediate marriage would be an inestimable benefit."

Agnes heard him with an agitation that was visible, chiefly, in her increasing paleness. Her eyes were fixed on the ground, and the expression of her countenance was melancholy and anxious.

"Mr. Sackville," said she, "I engaged last September to accept you, within the space of a year, and I received from you an assurance that no attempt should be made to hasten the period of our union, at least before the end of the next June. I had hoped that, on a point of such delicacy, this promise would have been strictly observed. I need not any longer ask you whether it has or not."

Sackville was startled by the unexpected tone of reproach in which her observation was

conveyed. "Excuse me;" said he, "if I *were* asked, I should say that I had not broken the promise you mention. You appealed to me, as your trustee, upon a matter of business. You asked how you can most easily obtain the power of assisting your parents. I answer, by marrying. It is the simple truth, and I could in no respect, have answered otherwise, even if I were not the person who is destined to become your husband."

"I am not disposed to deny the truth of what you say, Mr. Sackville," replied Agnes, coldly; "and I might be more obliged to you for the information, if it had been required. I knew the effect which my marriage would have upon the disposal of my fortune. I believed you to be perfectly conscious of my knowing it: and when you spoke of *other means*, I thought you were alluding to something *else*, of which I might possibly be ignorant. I asked you about the practicableness of a particular measure, and I have been answered by a description of the inflexible

disposition of Mr. Hawksworth. If my request is neither impossible or improper, I will not think so ill of Mr. Hawksworth as to suppose that he cannot be induced to consent to it. At all events, the attempt shall be made. I may fail, and I shall then know how to think of other resources ; but till then, I will not allow myself to be driven by a prospect of difficulties to take any other step."

Sackville felt rather embarrassed by the firmness with which she spoke, and her apparent perception of his real designs ; but he was too crafty and collected to allow his discomfiture to be apparent.

"I will be guided," said he, mildly, "by your wishes : but why this displeasure ? Suppose me even to have done the very worst you tax me with, to have urgently and directly pressed our immediate marriage, without any other plea than my own wishes, would this—*should* this—have been unpardonable ? Should it even have been seriously considered an offence ? It would

be hard to accuse me of so much as a want of delicate attention ; but never could it be said that I showed myself deficient in genuine attachment. It is one of the common errors of affection, my dear Agnes, to be inattentive to forms. It is true, I try to avoid this error. I know your disposition to shrink from profession, and, in obedience to this, I endeavour to lose the lover in the friend, and to act as if I were never destined to be bound to you by any dearer ties than those by which I have been devoted to your service, through the will of your excellent aunt. But you must not suppose that, because I betray little, I necessarily feel little ; and you will I hope excuse me, if the wish of my heart does sometimes escape, when any thing arises that is likely to promote it."

He regarded her with a look, which was meant to be that of love and admiration, but from which she shrunk with diffidence and dread. " Won't you say, that you forgive me, Agnes ?" added he, taking her cold but unre-

sisting hand. "A look, a smile—only a smile—and I shall be satisfied."

She did look up, and faintly smiled; but it was a smile, beneath which the countenance of Sackville fell, in momentary confusion, and he shrunk from the silent language of her eye, for it conveyed to him the intelligence that she was not deceived, and had no faith in his professions of affection.

But his presence of mind and pliant powers of dissimulation soon enabled him to rally, and he was boldly proceeding in the same strain, with the hope of convincing her by his perseverance, when Agnes at length stopped him.

"I began," said she, "by talking to you on a subject of business. Let us return to it. It seems that the only obstacle to my request is the difficulty of obtaining Mr. Hawksworth's consent. I am glad to hear that this is all. I shall spare no pains to obtain it, and I trust I shall succeed. I will write to him immediately, and as you do not seem to object to the reason-

ableness of my request, I hope it will be also supported by whatever you can urge in its favour."

Sackville promised his assistance, and pretended much eagerness to forward her project. It became his object to lull the suspicions of Agnes respecting his sincerity; and so dexterously did he pursue it, that, in spite of the unfavourableness of her impression, he eventually induced her to think that she had previously misconstrued his meaning, and been disposed to judge him too severely.

CHAPTER X.

Deceit cannot otherwise be maintained than by deceit.

SIR PHILIP SIDNEY.

IT was far from the intention of Sackville, that Agnes should succeed in her application to Mr. Hawksworth. Viewing her fortune, as that which was to become virtually his own, he was naturally averse to any expenditure which should check its present accumulation. He also dreaded the precedent which might be afforded by compliance, and the habit which Agnes might acquire of proffering assistance ; and no less did he fear, that Mr. Morton might learn to look for it from that source, and, with

such a prospect of support, relapse into his former habits of extravagance.

He had also fears respecting his engagement with Agnes. He knew that she was not attached to him, and had been driven into that engagement by the entreaties of her father, in order to save him from an exposure, which, after all, had not been averted. The only way in which her marriage could now be advantageous to her father, was by giving her an earlier power of assisting him ; and this prospect, and the promise, were the only ties by which Sackville held her. The engagement of marriage was such as any disagreement might cause her to break. If, therefore, a present power of extending relief to her parents were to be given to Agnes, it was by no means impossible that pleas might be found for the postponement of her marriage with him till the arrival of a fit period for asserting her independence.

Such were the results which Sackville apprehended from a compliance with the present

request of Agnes ; and, attributing to her, like most artful people, the same manœuvring disposition which he felt himself, he half suspected her of having in view, not so much the relief of her father, as her own eventual release from her engagement. He, therefore, resolved to frustrate her application at all hazards.

The character of Sackville's colleague was very favourable to the success of his plans. Mr. Hawksworth was a very honourable man, but weak and confiding, to a degree that rendered him an easy mark for imposition. He was timid and nervous, and fearful of acting in cases of emergency ; and Sackville, when he wished to have entirely his own way, could paralyze his operations at pleasure, by a skilful display of the difficulties of a case. An awful feeling of responsibility weighed like lead upon his conscientious mind ; and he was so beset with scruples, that he scarcely dared to do even what he believed to be right. He had a great respect

for the abilities of Sackville, and was led, by his own goodness of heart, to think that the probity of his colleague was equal to his talents.

Sackville had accurately noted all the qualifications of Mr. Hawksworth for a safe and passive coadjutor, and had himself dictated his selection to Mrs. Denham. Availing himself too of the retired habits of Mr. Hawksworth, he had prevented Agnes and her family from having much acquaintance with him, and he consequently found it not difficult to attribute to him any sentiments he pleased. While rendering him a mere puppet, entirely subservient to his will, he uniformly represented him to the Mortons as peculiarly intractable. The few traits of his character, which were allowed to appear, were ingeniously wrested for this purpose. His timid scrupulosity was construed into obstinacy, and a few antiquated notions were magnified into insurmountable prejudices. Thus it became easy for Sackville to plead the

opposition of Mr. Hawksworth, as a cause of the rejection of any measure that he was himself unwilling to adopt.

Sackville entered with apparent zeal into Agnes's project of writing to Mr. Hawksworth, and he promised to support her application by a letter from himself, which letter she was to see. He brought it to her, and after she had read it, and expressed her approbation of its contents, it was sealed and directed in her presence. He then took charge of that, and of her letter, promising to send them at the same time. This promise was never performed. Both letters were suppressed; and, in the place of that which he had shown to Agnes, he sent, on that same day, the following :

“MY DEAR SIR,

“During the two last days, I have had a good deal of conversation with our young charge, on the subject of her father's situation, and I am sorry to find, that she still entertains the same

unfortunate wish, of which I before informed you, relative to the application of money to his relief, out of the interest of her own fortune. There is, however, this difference in her present intentions, that whereas they formerly extended to the wild idea of paying off Mr. Morton's debts, they are now confined to the more feasible plan, of rendering his present situation rather more comfortable.

“ I need not tell you that, in point of strict justice, her present intentions are much less defensible than her former ones. Undoubtedly not one farthing ought to be expended on superfluities, as long as any just debts remain unpaid. Agnes very naturally prefers the gratification of her parents, to satisfying the demands of their creditors ; and when one considers her tender and pliant disposition, and the influence which her father has over her, one surely cannot wonder at it.

“ But it is our duty, my dear Sir, unpleasant as it may be, to prevent her from sacrificing her-

self to an overstrained sense of filial devotion. We must not allow her to be preyed upon by the necessities of others, however nearly connected, and however anxious she may seem to assist them.

“ As for the situation of Mr. Morton, if I must speak plainly on so delicate a subject, I cannot, I confess, see any sufficient call for additional expenditure. He cannot live splendidly, or receive much company, or indulge his natural taste for show ; but he has every thing that is necessary for mere comfort, and this is all that, under present circumstances, he *ought* to require. If he seeks for more than this, and wishes to emerge from his retirement, and indulge in the pleasures of society, which I suspect to be the case, nothing less than a very considerable addition to his present allowance will be in any degree sufficient.

“ Nor would the evil end here. One expense would lead to another. Demands upon us would increase, and I fear nothing short of

the whole of our young ward's income would eventually satisfy them. With such demands we could not comply, and an altercation and quarrel would be the most probable consequence. I have always observed, that when successive applications are to be expected, it is safest to resist them *in limine*. After the admission of a principle, it is very difficult to settle the question of degree, without giving offence. I need hardly remind you of the irritability of Mr. Morton's disposition, and the likelihood of offence being taken, and very seriously too.

“ I rather think you will receive a letter soon from Miss Morton, upon the subject mentioned above. Should such be the case, and you think proper to write in return, it will be an accommodation to the Mortons if the letter is sent under cover to me. But perhaps you will allow me to suggest, that it would be better to take no immediate notice of the application. It is sometimes dangerous to communicate, on subjects like these, otherwise than personally. Letters

are liable to be misinterpreted. Should you, however, prefer writing, the safer way (if you do not object to it) is to authorize, me by a letter, which, in case of emergency, I could show, to explain your sentiments to them. I have so long had the pleasure of acting with you, that I think there is no danger of any misconception arising between ourselves.

“ In your last letter, you gave me hopes of seeing you soon in town. For my own sake I am selfish enough to wish it may be so—for yours, I ought to wish that it may not. London, which is always hateful to every one who knows the pleasures of the country, is now peculiarly disagreeable, just at the commencement of its summer turmoil. If the business on which you are coming does not absolutely require your own presence, and I can be of any use, pray tell me. I am afraid this unpleasant affair of the Mortons will tend to render your stay less agreeable. I fear you will be exposed to much solicitation, and the risk of a quarrel; but I will do all in

my power to spare you as much as possible. I have not yet informed the Mortons of your intentions; and I think it will be much pleasanter for you, if they have no previous knowledge of your arrival, that they may not be prepared for the attack. I shall, therefore, say nothing about it, and you of course will not write to them.

“With best wishes for your continuance in health, believe me, my dear Sir, ever most faithfully yours,

“EDWARD SACKVILLE.

“P. S. May I beg of you, to burn this letter? I am sure I may trust to your not committing me with the Mortons, by making any allusion to it when you meet them in town.”

We have seen that the letter written by Agnes was suppressed. She waited long for that answer which was never to arrive, and at length determined to write again. To this course she was insidiously urged by Sackville ;

and as he affected to enter zealously into her wishes, he was allowed to see what her letter contained. He did not endeavour to suppress it, but he wrote to Mr. Hawksworth by the same post, availing himself of his knowledge of what Agnes had stated, for the purpose of weakening its impression, and he requested that no immediate notice might be taken of it.

In addition to other motives, Sackville had some hope that, by tormenting Agnes with these difficulties and delays, he might at length induce her to forsake her project. But he did not calculate sufficiently upon her firmness of purpose ; and was unpleasantly surprised, about a week after she had sent the second letter, by hearing her propose, as a last resource, to go down to Mr. Hawksworth's place, and confer with him in person. Her plan seemed to be maturely arranged ; her parents did not disapprove ; her brother would accompany her, and Lord Malvern had offered her a travelling carriage for the purpose.

Sackville's varied powers of persuasion and attack were instantly put into requisition to combat this unforeseen and dangerous resolution. At first the smile of incredulity was tried, and the tone of playful banter; but they were met in the same manner; and then, at length, he was reminded that her object was too serious to admit of a defeat from the arms of ridicule. Graver objections were then stated: the singularity of the step, the punctilious prejudices of Mr. Hawksworth, the implied reflection on him for neglect of attention to her request, and the absence of sufficient delay to warrant such an extremity.

The discussion was adjourned to the following day, and then Sackville yielded his reluctant approbation of the plan, after entreating that she would defer her journey for a few days; and it was at length arranged that, unless she previously received an answer, Agnes should quit London, with her brother, on the ensuing Monday. The distance from London to Mr.

Hawksworth's place, was sufficient to occupy two days; and Sackville begged that Agnes would do him the favour to make use of his house at Trentford, as a resting place, on the first night, both in going and returning.

This offer had been accepted by her father in her behalf, even before she had heard it herself; and she did not like to make an ungracious return to Sackville's courtesy by non-compliance.

CHAPTER XI.

Can such things be,
And overcome us, like a summer cloud,
Without our special wonder ?

Macbeth.

THE appointed day arrived, and Agnes and her brother quitted London. Late in the evening, they reached Trentford, which they found had, in pursuance of the attentive directions of Sackville, been carefully prepared for their reception. They left it again on the following morning, and about the close of that day, Agnes with a beating heart, found herself approaching the venerable mansion of Mr. Hawksworth. She felt that an important moment was almost present, that, uncertain of the issue, she was about to throw herself upon

the compassion of one, with whom, strong as was his influence over her, she had but little personal acquaintance, and to encounter prejudices, which, as she had been told, would seldom yield, even to the persuasive powers of Sackville. She remembered the arguments by which he had sought to oppose her resolution, and almost bewailed her rashness, in having so hastily overruled them.

The shades of evening were closing in, and as she drove up to the door of the mansion, its melancholy and deserted air filled her, she knew not why, with ominous forebodings. The shutters were all closed, though it might still be called daylight; no living being was to be seen or heard, and they waited in long suspense, after repeated ringing and knocking, before any notice seemed to be taken of their arrival. At length the creaking and rattling of bars, bolts, and locks were heard within. The time which these preparations occupied, shewed very plainly the excessive care with which the

entrance had been guarded, a care which, to the mind of Agnes, seemed unpleasantly characteristic of what she considered the morose, suspicious temper of the owner.

The door, at last, was cautiously opened, and the trusty guardian of this well-barred portal, appeared in the person of an old woman. The motive for these precautions, and the tardy compliance with the summons, were explained by her answer to the first question: and Agnes heard, with surprise, that Mr. Hawksworth had set out for London on the preceding morning.

Much as Agnes had dreaded the expected interview a few moments before, she felt considerable disappointment. The object of a long journey was completely frustrated; and she had incurred some anxiety, which she might otherwise have been spared: and though the meeting might perhaps take place under pleasanter auspices in London, this was but a slight consolation. It seemed singular to her that

such a mistake should have occurred, and that not even Sackville was previously informed of Mr. Hawksworth's intentions; but she had been taught to view the latter as an eccentric man, and this accounted for all that was strange and unforeseen.

Fortunately for Sackville, she entertained no suspicion of the vile artifice, which he had employed. Previous to her quitting London, Sackville had been informed, by letter, of the precise day on which Mr. Hawksworth would set out on his journey. His opposition to the plan proposed by Agnes was then softened, and he only intreated her to await the expected answer till a stated day, naming that which he knew would exactly cause her to miss the person whom she went to see. He believed his treachery to be safe from discovery, and he was urged to it by a sense of the importance of securing a first interview with Mr. Hawksworth, and not allowing him to be exposed to the fascinating persuasions of his young ward

till he had been steeled and tutored by a sufficient store of cogent reasons.

Agnes felt some reluctance in remaining that night at Mr. Hawksworth's, an uninvited guest, in the absence of the owner ; but the old portress, who, as she soon informed her, bore the dignity of housekeeper of the mansion, urged her to stay. The engaging countenance and manners of Agnes won her heart at first sight ; and the knowledge of her being the rich young lady to whom her master was guardian, together with the opportunity of displaying the great extent of her discretionary power, quite counterbalanced all the additional trouble which the invitation would cost her.

The mansion was old and sombre, full within of dark oak pannels, and rambling passages, and possessed the honours of a haunted room. But the nerves of Agnes were not, by that fatality which always attended the heroines of the Radcliffe school, exposed to a trial of its terrors ; and her brother, though he professed

that he should "like the fun," was not permitted by the considerate housekeeper to rue the consequences of his presumption. No adventure offered itself; and the next morning, under the cheerful auspices of a bright April sun, they set out from Mr. Hawksworth's, and arrived again that night at Trentford.

This return was not expected so soon, and seemed to give little satisfaction to one of the servants, a man who had lived several years with Mr. Sackville, and in whom he always seemed to place rather more confidence than in the others.

Agnes found here a letter from Sackville. It informed her, of his having that instant discovered that Mr. Hawksworth would not be at his own house when she arrived there; expressed the utmost grief for the unnecessary trouble she was exposed to, and trusted that his letter might still be in time to save her from performing more than half of her intended journey. This he knew would not be case, nor did he mean that it should. He wrote

solely with the intention of removing any suspicion of treachery on his part, that might possibly have arisen in the mind of Agnes. We have mentioned, that her pure and candid mind had not admitted the idea of any such extent of villainous deceit. The letter, therefore, operated no change in her impressions, but merely confirmed her unsuspectingness.

There are states of the mind, in which we are peculiarly disposed to conjure up the most gloomy and dispiriting views of our past and present situation. This was now the case with Agnes: the fatigue of three successive days of travelling, had perhaps tended, in no slight degree, to relax the usual elasticity of her spirits. But there was ample cause for gloom and despondency, even in the most plain and dispassionate view of the events which had happened, and were still likely to ensue. Bitterly did she regret what she now considered the too easy surrender of her affections to Lacy. It was true, he had almost explicitly declared

his attachment ; and there was something in his manner, at their last meeting, which indicated that he still felt it.

But how was this to be reconciled with his avowed engagement to Miss Hartley ? That was a practical contradiction, before which the weight of his half-uttered protestations sunk into comparative insignificance. She knew nothing of the circumstances which had led to that engagement ; but she knew that it had been talked of before her acquaintance with Lacy began. Miss Hartley was probably the first and rightful possessor of his heart, and she herself was but reaping the punishment of an act of forgetful aggression.

Cruel, indeed, had been her lot. On her seemed to have descended the terrible denunciation of scripture ; she had been “ cursed even in her blessings.” Her parents, from whom she should seek for comfort and protection, had been the cause of deep affliction : the innocent admission of a first attachment had been turned

to poison ; and her wealth had subjected her to a thralldom, of which a type may be found in the tyranny of Mezentius, who chained together the living and the dead.

“ Would that my lot had been more humble !” she exclaimed, almost aloud, in the solitude of her own apartment. “ Oh, that I had not possessed this fatal wealth, but for which, he to whom I am now plighted never would have sought me !” She wished at length to dismiss these thoughts and seek forgetfulness and repose ; but in vain. The fever of her mind prevented her from sleeping, and she arose and looked out at the cold moonlight scene, which the view from the window afforded.

It was a bright, clear night. Only a few fleecy clouds floated in the sky, and from among them, the stars glimmered faintly, almost extinguished by the splendour of the moon, now high in the heavens, and near the full. Its white, cold, watery beams, that were shed

over the landscape, deprived every object, however plainly visible, of its daylight tint, and gave to the whole the appearance of being slightly overspread with snow. The adjoining lake, one of the chief ornaments of the place, and the expanse of sky, objects that in the day were lightest, were now enveloped in the deepest gloom. All the solemnity of night seemed to be concentrated in them, and the rest was unnaturally brightened.

Though the forms remained the same, so great was the difference of hue, that Agnes could scarcely recognize the scene on which she had gazed before. All was still: not even the feathery summits of the loftiest trees could be seen to move, nor did the gentlest rustle meet the ear. If solitude is ever terrible, it is chiefly when accompanied with silence; and Agnes could scarcely avoid feeling in some degree appalled by its present solemnity. She was not more accessible to feelings of superstitious dread, than the boldest of her sex may some-

times be ; yet she felt, she knew not why, an ominous chill of fear, and longed for an indication, however slight, that some living thing was still waking as well as herself. The scream of the owl, or even the tick of the death-watch would have been almost music to her ear at that awful moment.

She listened ; and at length a sound was heard, though so indistinctly, that at first she thought herself deceived. It seemed to come from below, but she hardly knew whether from within or out of the house. Once she plainly distinguished something like the creaking of a bar, and afterwards it seemed as if the sash of a window was gently raised. Then all was still as death ; then a slight rustling sound was heard, and afterwards a repetition of the former, as if the window was being closed again ; and then once more all was still. A terrible thought flashed across the mind of Agnes at this moment ; that robbers were entering the house, and had probably, ere

this, effected their purpose. She stood for a few minutes, in a state of breathless alarm, screening herself from view, behind a corner of the window, listening intently, and straining her eyes to penetrate the shadowy recesses of the shrubbery below.

She had not looked long when she thought she saw something move, but was not certain, and imagined for an instant that fear might have made her senses deceitful. But it was not so; again she saw it, but knew not what the object was. She drew still farther back, and watched with a more intent anxiety. Presently, a figure, scarcely distinguishable from the surrounding objects but by the shadow which it cast, was seen to emerge from the bushes, and move gently from the house. It was a man of rather low stature, whose stealthy, cautious tread, showed that he wished to avoid observation. He looked frequently from side to side, and once, screening himself behind an evergreen, he turned round, and seemed to reconnoitre the

windows ; and, as far as she could judge by the direction of his head, he was particularly observing her's. She could not distinguish his features, which appeared to be concealed by crape. In an instant, he had turned away his head, moved onwards, and in a few seconds was out of sight.

Agnes remained long pondering in astonishment and dread on this singular apparition. One thing seemed evident to her, that this person, be he who he might, had clandestinely quitted the house ; but whether he were one of the household, or a thief that had gained secret entrance, was more than she could decide. The more she thought, the more she inclined to the former opinion : she believed she had heard the window closed and fastened again, and this could only have been done by some assistant within.

This was a less terrifying impression, and she was glad to adopt it. She debated with herself for a while, whether she should alarm the

household immediately, or wait till the morning ; and irresolution and fear so far triumphed as to induce her, perhaps erroneously, to pursue the less prompt course, and defer her communication. She was fatigued in mind and body ; and, in spite of the alarm, caused by what she had witnessed, sleep at length surprised her, and the morning came before she next awoke.

At first, her recollection of the past circumstance was by no means clear, and she almost doubted whether the whole was not a dream. But by degrees the obscurity vanished, and the scene returned so vividly to her mind, when she stood at the spot from which she had seen the figure, and traced the course it had taken ; and so many concomitant facts now rose to her remembrance, that she soon dismissed every particle of doubt, and gave immediate information of all that she had witnessed.

The intelligence was received with many demonstrations of surprise and dismay, and in some with a slight appearance of incredulity. The

person which Agnes had seen was strictly affirmed not to be any of the household ; and, indeed, she did not think that his figure bore any resemblance, though her judgment on this point must necessarily have been imperfect. On the other hand, if it was a robber (as was remarked by the confidential servant above alluded to), and he had entered the house, he must have taken something away, and it was their first object to ascertain if any locks had been broken open, or if any thing was missing. A careful search was instantly commenced, which ended in their coming to the conclusion that everything appeared to remain precisely as it was the day before.

During this search, on the part of the household, Agnes recommended to her brother to look for the traces of feet in those parts of the shrubbery, where, according to the best of her recollection, the figure had appeared, and particularly under the window, which she had heard opened and shut. He did look, and found

nothing. Agnes was surprised, nay, almost inclined to waver in her belief as to the reality of what she had seen. A weaker mind might have been led to think that the figure was an unearthly visitant. In fact, the absence of traces might be accounted for by the circumstance of there having been a frost in the night, though it had begun to thaw towards day-break.

Her brother, however, who had all along been rather incredulous, now lost all faith in the correctness of her story, upon finding it so utterly unsupported by any other circumstance. He believed it to be the result of a feverish imagination, or a dream, the impression of which had been so vivid as to seem like truth; and he laboured to persuade his sister, that if she had really seen what she described, she would have immediately given the alarm, instead of going quietly to sleep; and such is the imperfection of our senses, and our want of reliance on them,

that Agnes was almost disposed to subscribe to his opinion.

One slight circumstance only, which appeared upon re-examination of the room the window of which was supposed to have been opened, tended to confirm her previous impressions; it was nothing more than a drop of oil upon the floor, near one of the windows. A closer examination showed that oil had been applied to the hinges of the shutters, and various parts of this window, and it was easy to conceive that it was done with a view of lessening the noise of opening and closing. There were two other windows in the room, neither of which bore the same appearance. The room was one which Sackville used as a sitting-room, and in which he generally transacted business. It was the room in which he showed to Allen his forgery, and the documents which confirmed it. There were in it a large library-table furnished with drawers, and a bureau,

all locked, and believed to contain papers and articles of value.

Agnes was anxious to return to London, and quitted Trentford that morning without any additional circumstances having transpired which tended to throw a light upon this mysterious affair. While changing horses at the solitary inn of a small town, about fifty miles from Trentford, a person came up to the carriage, and taking off his hat, civilly inquired whether he was not speaking to Miss Morton, and informed her that his name was Allen. The information was needless, as she knew him by sight. His object in addressing her appeared to be no other than to make inquiries after Mr. Morton, who, he said, he was sorry to hear had been very unwell. Agnes assured him that the report he had received must have been exaggerated; and, after another observation or two, he again bowed and walked away.

This was the only face she knew that met her

eye in her way to London ; and, without any incident of the slightest moment, she again returned to the humble and melancholy dwelling of her parents.

CHAPTER XII.

Flat burglary as ever was committed.

Much ado about Nothing.

ON the following day, at an early hour, Sackville presented himself to the Mortons. To Agnes he was full of condolence and regret upon the fruitlessness of her journey, and the arrival of his own letter too late to be of use. Agnes, in return, had much to say to him, and among other things, related all that had passed at Trentford.

Sackville heard her tale, at first, merely as an amusing incident, and seemed prepared to treat it lightly ; but, as she proceeded, his attention became more deeply fixed. He looked grave,

and, at length, changed colour, and ended with declaring that he entertained little doubt of his having been robbed. He even begged her to recapitulate all the circumstances, and in the presence of her father committed the whole to paper. His manner showed that the facts she mentioned appeared to him of the most serious import ; and such was his eagerness to satisfy his doubts that he set out immediately from London, and arrived at Trentford that night.

It was very late when he reached it, but before he slept he commenced his examination. He began with his own sitting-room, out of which the person was supposed to have escaped. All that had been locked remained so still, and therefore the theft, if such there were, must have been committed by means of false keys. He knew that there was much to lose, and his hand trembled with anxiety as he turned the first lock. His anxious eye soon fell upon some money, which he remembered to have left in the drawer which he first opened : he counted it, and it was

still the same: he then looked for other valuables, and he found them all untouched. He directed his attention in turn to every object that could be supposed to excite the cupidity of a robber, but all remained where he had left them; and, after a long and anxious search, he closed his eyes that night, without having been able to discover that he had suffered the slightest loss.

He arose next morning, well pleased with the result of his investigation, and only vexed at having been rendered uneasy, and led to undertake a journey by an idle tale, perhaps the fabrication of a feverish fancy, and which had been proved to end in nothing. He was, however, struck by the singular retribution which caused him to receive at the hands of Agnes the punishment of an anxious and unnecessary journey, in return for that to which he had exposed her. After all, was it a hoax? Was it done for the sake of tormenting him, or of getting him out

of the way during their first interview with Mr. Hawksworth ?

This was a very improbable course for Agnes to adopt ; but, in conformity with the proneness of artful people to suspect others, strange and unworthy as the idea was, Sackville, for a moment, entertained it. He determined, however, before he went away to investigate a little farther, and again opened the bureau which stood in his own sitting-room. Suddenly, a fearful thought flashed across his mind : he knew not why it occurred at that moment, or why it had never struck him before ; but it made his countenance turn alternately red and pale with agitation. A search was then commenced among his papers, and was continued for several minutes. Exclamations of apprehension and trouble frequently escaped him, till at length there was a dead pause, and he sat for some time motionless. It seemed as if his worst fears were realized ; and, after the stupor of surprise

his feelings burst forth into passionate exclamations of mingled anger and despair.

The instrument of his controul over Allen, the forged paper, with its accompanying documents, could no longer be found. Every thing else appeared to remain precisely in its former place. Nothing was even disarranged; and but for the intimation which he had received from Agnes, months, years, might have elapsed before he had become sensible of his loss. The removal of these important papers could, of course, be attributed to no other person than Allen; but it was difficult to believe that he had committed so daring a crime without the assistance of some person belonging to the house. The probability of domestic treachery tended to embitter the loss to Sackville, more especially as his suspicions fell upon the servant in whom he had hitherto reposed most confidence.

Another aggravating recollection arose to his mind. It was, that he himself was in some degree the cause of that which had happened. If

he had not complied with Allen's request to be allowed to see the forged paper, that person would never have known where it might be found. How incautious had he been to restore the paper in Allen's presence to its former place, and to allow it to remain there! But he had never contemplated the probability of such a bold extent of villany.

"I was a fool," he bitterly exclaimed, "to tamper with crime, and not to be prepared for the worst that might ensue; to admit a felon to my confidence, and trust to his forbearance. I knew that the man was crafty and unscrupulous, but I undervalued his resolution." He then remembered how on the occasion of showing the paper, he vainly flattered himself to have obtained a signal triumph over the poor trembling tool of his villainies; but now the crafty wretch had triumphed in his turn, and the able and artful Sackville seemed to shrink to a humble tyro, in cunning and audacity, compared with the mean and half-educated man whom he had

once moulded to his will. He felt degraded in his own eyes by having been thus outwitted, and vowed revenge on his insidious aggressor.

But this revenge was not easily to be obtained. There were many difficulties in the way of legal redress. He was fully persuaded that the lost papers could have been taken by no other than Allen, but his presumptive evidence was not of that kind which would be satisfactory in a court of justice. No pecuniary value could be assigned to the papers, nor would it even be possible to prove that such had ever existed. Allen, if brought to trial, would probably defend himself by denying all knowledge of them, and declaring the whole to be a malicious fiction; and Sackville knew not how he should reply. He might lay open a full account of the whole of the transaction which had passed between them; but how disgraceful would that exposure be to himself! He should even be obliged to confess himself guilty of a misprision of felony, and his character would be irrevocably blasted. He

should be obliged to declare upon a trial that no money or other valuable property had been touched, not even that which had been deposited in the same place with the lost papers; and this circumstance would throw over the proceedings a suspicion, which would be almost fatal to his cause.

Such were the difficulties which would present themselves, even in the case of his having a reasonable probability of being able to attach the act of burglary to Allen. But this was found to be far from an easy task; and the exertions which Sackville made to trace his progress on the day preceding and following the robbery, were utterly unsuccessful. He recollected having heard from Agnes, in the course of conversation, that she saw him on the following day at a place fifty miles from Trentford, and though the "alibi" was not conclusive, it was strongly in Allen's favour. Sackville made diligent inquiries at this place respecting Allen, but could gain no information, except from one

person, who had rather a confused recollection of a man, corresponding to the description, having come to the inn on foot.

Sackville, therefore, dismissed all hope of bringing the delinquent to justice; and his revengeful feelings were compelled to satisfy themselves with the prospect of secretly blasting the character of the man on whom he could no longer calculate as a submissive tool, and whom he could not, with safety, openly attack.

Little doubt will probably be entertained by our readers of the guilt of Allen; but they may, nevertheless, think it more satisfactory to be presented with an explicit statement of the truth. The person whom Agnes saw was Allen. Ever since his discovery of the situation in which the forged paper was kept, he had resolutely determined to destroy it. The atrocious project of burning down the whole house once occurred to his guilty mind; but it was abandoned for the safer plan which he afterwards carried into execution. His first step was to

obtain, by means of a considerable bribe, the assistance of that servant, to whom we have before alluded, as one in whom Sackville reposed peculiar confidence. This man, as the event showed, was utterly unworthy of that confidence: but it is the common fate of rich and powerful villainy to fall a victim to the humble instruments by whose aid it seeks to advance itself.

From this servant Allen obtained impressions in wax of Sackville's keys, and procured false keys to be made. Next, it was necessary that Allen should be clandestinely admitted, this servant being the only person intrusted with the secret. The time had been settled without any expectation of Agnes and her brother being then at Trentford, and after their unforeseen return there was no opportunity for further concert. At midnight Allen was introduced into the house, unlocked the bureau, and after a long and careful search, found, and carried off, his own forgery and the attesting documents.

Every precaution had been taken to ensure

his silent and secret escape. The situation of the room occupied by Agnes was, however, unfavourable, and in fixing his eyes upon the window, he faintly perceived her figure receding from it, as if she had observed him. This caused in him no slight alarm, for he foresaw all the consequences to which her observation might lead, and even dreaded an immediate pursuit. But fertile in resources, he resolved to turn this apparent danger into an advantage, and knowing the direction in which she would travel, he rode all night till he had reached a considerable distance from Trentford, and leaving his horse a few miles from the place where he afterwards accosted her, walked thither, and awaited her coming.

Thus providing for the worst that could ensue, an eventual trial, he should be able to convert the principal witness against him into the most effectual means of his defence.

CHAPTER XIII.

A wise man endeavours, by considering all circumstances, to make conjectures and form conclusions : but the smallest accident intervening (and in the course of affairs it is impossible to foresee all) does often produce such turns and changes, that at last he is just as much in doubt of events as the most ignorant and inexperienced person.

SWIFT.

SACKVILLE, on his way back to London, anxiously reflected on the policy which it was advisable to adopt in speaking to the Mortons of his loss ; and as he could not describe the nature of it, he thought it was better to treat it lightly. He, therefore, told them that the only things missing were a few papers, which he himself had probably mislaid, but that nothing was gone that any thief was likely to take. He seemed perfectly unruffled ; and smiled when

he spoke of the supposed robber, as if he doubted whether the senses of Agnes had not deceived her, though politeness withheld him from plainly expressing that opinion.

Much as he longed to take his meditated revenge, by secret accusations of Allen, he felt that prudence dictated forbearance; and that it was necessary to disentangle himself from all connection with the instrument of his villainies, or place himself beyond the reach of his retaliation, before he attempted to crush him.

Independent of the serious discovery which Sackville had made at Trentford, he found much cause to regret his absence from London. Three days had materially altered the aspect of affairs between the Mortons and Mr. Hawksworth, and brought them to a state of mutual good understanding, very detrimental to the views of Sackville, and which, had he been in town, he would have laboured to prevent. As Sackville's evil stars would

have it, Mr. Morton, wishing, very naturally, to show all possible attention to the guardian of his daughter, had called upon Mr. Hawksworth, and invited him to dine with them that same day. The entertainment to be sure was such as Mr. Morton would once have shuddered at the bare thought of either giving or receiving; but Mr. Hawksworth, as his inviter expected, was not fastidious upon these points.

The result of that evening was, the removal of many erroneous impressions from the minds of each party. Mr. Hawksworth found, in Mr. Morton, a very gentlemanly man, of mild, and engaging manners; and he was delighted with Agnes, and perfectly well pleased with the languid good humour of Lady Louisa.

The Mortons, on their part, found Mr. Hawksworth by no means the strange, bigotted, intractable person which he had been represented to them. He seemed a shy, quiet,

good-natured, elderly man, full of old-fashioned ceremonious politeness, and rather slow in his ideas, and elaborate in his phraseology; naturally nervous, strongly impressed, through the timidity of his character, with a fear of committing himself, or of giving offence, but, at the same time, candid and benevolent.

Mr. Hawskworth did not find himself assailed by those solicitations which Sackville had caused him to dread. The ill-timed journey undertaken by Agnes, was necessarily mentioned; but during the whole of the first day, no allusion was made to the object of it, and it was not till he himself called upon the Mortons the following morning, that Agnes, who requested a short and private conference, then introduced her application. To the surprise of Agnes, she then found that Mr. Hawskworth was by no means so rigid and inflexible in his notions as she was prepared to expect. He did not seem very

unfavourable to her request, nor had much to urge in opposition to it. He seemed only timid in the execution of his office ; talked much of his responsibility, and the necessity of mature consideration, long pompous words, which he often repeated ; and was evidently afraid of doing any thing without the entire concurrence of Sackville. Nevertheless, urged by a sincere desire to gratify, as far as was consistent with his duty, the wishes of Agnes, he at length declared, that if not opposed by the opinion of his colleague, he should be happy, for his own part, to accede to her request.

He was not a little surprised to learn, that Sackville had delivered precisely the same sentiments ; and he could hardly reconcile the circumstance with a perfect fairness of proceeding. However, this assurance, coming as it did from the lips of Agnes, quite disarmed Mr. Hawksworth of all his intended severity of opposition ; and Sackville, on his arrival, found,

to his dismay, that the negociation was in such a train that there remained but little hope of frustrating its fulfilment. He came to this conclusion, after two separate conversations with Agnes and with Mr. Hawksworth, in which he was obliged to exercise his ingenuity in qualifying and unsaying a good deal that he had said before.

Having once resolved to permit the request of Agnes to be granted, he took care to appropriate the greatest share of credit to himself, and to appear to lead rather than to follow ; and he entered with such apparent zeal into the furtherance of her wishes, and seemed so sincerely happy in the prospect of their fulfilment, that Agnes felt, for a moment, as if she could almost learn to love him.

“ And now that we have gained our point,” said he, to Agnes, with his most engaging smile, “ there is a project which I mean to propose to your father and Lady Louisa, and

which I think will be for their benefit and comfort, and which I hope they will approve of. No, no," he added, seeing her blush, and look alarmed, "it is not the object which I have most at heart; it is calculated for their good rather than for ours—or *mine*, I believe I ought to say."

This project was, that the Mortons should make use of the money to be advanced to them out of the accumulated interest of their daughter's fortune for the last three years, for the purpose of enabling them to go abroad. Sackville urged this measure with all the force of his persuasive eloquence; and he painted so well its numerous advantages and pleasures, the benefit to be expected to their health and spirits, and the easy rate at which comparative luxuries might be obtained in foreign countries, that it was soon unanimously voted; and it was finally decided, that it should be carried into execution, if possible, in the course of a month.

Sackville would fain have induced them to name an earlier time ; but Lady Louisa had an insuperable objection to crossing the sea before the spring gales had quite subsided, and could not have made up her mind to so serious a step with less time for preparation.

We have seen that the plans of Sackville have undergone a sudden change, and it will be necessary to detail the motives by which he was actuated. One of them was his jealousy of Lacy, and his consequent wish to remove Agnes from the possibility of meeting him. He feared, with reason, that her attachment for him was not quite extinct, and was made uneasy even by the slight circumstance of her having dined in his company at the Bagshawes. He also felt that he had lost his former hold upon Allen, and could not stifle an indistinct apprehension, that some of his nefarious transactions with that person might, by some means or other, come to the knowledge of the Mortons. But if

he could once carry the Mortons abroad, this danger would almost cease.

Such were some of the considerations which led to his sudden proposal of a removal to the Continent.

CHAPTER XIV.

 Their great guilt,
 Like poison given to work a great time after,
 Now 'gins to bite the spirits.

Tempest.

It was not without reason that Sackville reflected with dismay on the cessation of his former means of influence over Allen. It could not be doubted that a person who had adopted such vigorous measures to effect his independence, would avail himself of it to the utmost; and even if Sackville could have any hopes of employing his offices for the future, it must be by dint of bribery, rather than of compulsion. Besides, he knew that the tables were turned, and that instead of Allen being in his power,

he himself was now in Allen's. He knew that the latter had in his possession, letters and papers relative to some of their late infamous transactions; and it was not impossible that cupidity or revenge might lead him at some time or other, to make an unfriendly use of them. It was, therefore, of the first importance to Sackville, to get them out of Allen's hands.

It was known to Sackville that Allen was to come up to town shortly, for the purpose of being examined before a committee upon a projected railway. He accordingly wrote to him, employing the most gracious and friendly terms, wishing success to the business in behalf of which he was engaged, proffered his own good offices, and then concluded a letter of more specious profession than he generally thought necessary to use towards his inferiors, by requesting that Allen would bring to London, and deliver to him, certain letters and papers, which he then specified. In a few days, he

received an answer from Allen, stating, that if the above-mentioned letters and papers could be found, they should be brought.

Allen at length arrived in London, and Sackville sent to him to request a conference. He obeyed the summons, and the confederates once more met. There was no change in Allen's manner. It was civil and submissive as before. Sackville also tried to behave the same as usual ; but, in spite of himself, an inward sense of insecurity induced him to soften his former tone of command, and blend with it more of courtesy and persuasion.

"Well, my good friend," said he to Allen, after talking for a while on subjects of minor importance, "I know you are a man of your word, and therefore, I need hardly ask whether you have brought those letters which I wrote to you about "

"I have, Sir," replied Allen, drily.

"Quite right—many thanks to you ; and you have got them here ?" pursued Sackville,

endeavouring to repress all appearance of the eagerness which he really felt.

“No, Sir,” returned the other, in the same quiet tone. “I have not brought them with me now.”

“Indeed! well—it does not much signify. You can bring them to me to-morrow.”

Allen returned no immediate answer, but cast his eyes on the ground, with an air of mystery and reluctance.

“Where is the difficulty?” said Sackville, with impatience.

“Difficulty?—oh, none, I hope, Sir; I dare say we shall soon come to a proper arrangement;” then, after another pause, he added drily, “A man, Sir, must live.”

“Is that a new discovery of yours?” replied Sackville, with a laugh. “The observation is true enough; but I don’t exactly see the drift of it. Pray what does it mean?”

“It means just this, Sir; that I have exposed myself to a good deal of risk and inconvenience

on your account, in all these affairs, not to mention the trouble, which was no trifle ; and I hope, Sir, that if I am to give you up the letters and papers that you wrote about, you will not object, in return, to make me a handsome consideration."

"What do you call a handsome consideration ?"

"Oh, Sir," replied Allen, with affected moderation, "I don't presume to dictate to you : I leave it to your generosity."

"My generosity declines answering. I must insist upon your telling me what you expect."

Allen hesitated, and turned away for a moment, as if in the act of calculating. "I am sorry, Sir," said he, after a short period of silence, "that you will force me to name the terms myself, for I don't like to seem encroaching and exorbitant ; but, if I must speak, I will tell you at once, honestly and plainly, that

I think, the least I ought to take, is five thousand pounds."

Sackville received this announcement with a mingled expression of astonishment and rage, and his colour rose as he indignantly surveyed the associate of his villainies.

"Excellent!" he replied: "this almost exceeds belief. And do you pretend to say, that unless I comply with this modest request, you shall withhold the papers I asked for?"

"I certainly shall," replied Allen, firmly.

"Very well," pursued the other, "then I shall know what course to take. Hark you, Sir, when I asked you to name your demand, it was without the slightest intention of complying with it, even had the sum been trifling compared with that which you have mentioned. You have no right to make any stipulation; and I shall steadily resist such an aggression.

"I am sorry for it, for the sake of both of us," replied Allen, coolly.

There was a threat implied in this speech, which stung Sackville to the quick; and his rage at being thus rebelled against by the hitherto submissive instrument of his will, was almost too great for concealment. But prudence warned him that he had a difficult part to play, and he paused for reflection, before he ventured to reply.

"Allen," he answered, fixing upon him a penetrating glance of scrutiny, "this language is new. You seem to have forgotten, all at once, the tremendous punishment which hangs over you, and which my hand can let fall. You now talk as if you were at liberty to stipulate, upon more than equal terms, and as if my power had ceased; and I ask you, Sir, the reason of this change;" and Sackville, as he uttered this ensnaring question, again fixed his eyes upon Allen, as if he would read his very thoughts.

Allen bore this terrible scrutiny with a composure that surprised his querist. He was per-

fectly unabashed, and seemed even indifferent. He was amply endowed with that presence of mind, and command of countenance, which serve to constitute what may be called civil courage. Perhaps he would not, with such firmness, have met the eye of an honest man ; but his knowledge of Sackville's character blunted the efficacy of the attack. It was but the encounter of artifice with artifice, of guilt with guilt. It was a mere trial of boldness and address, in which the secret stings of an evil conscience had no power to operate.

“ Mr. Sackville,” said Allen, calmly, “ I have no objection to tell you my reasons, for I wish to be open in my dealings with *you*. I know, Sir, that you have in your possession evidence against me, which, if you chose to make use of it, might ruin me for ever. But, Sir, I have been considering the subject, and I don't think that you will ever choose to make use of it in that way. I am a plain, simple man, Sir, and no lawyer ; but I know that there is such

an offence as misprision of felony ; and I know, that in case of a trial, even though you did bring me to justice, it could not be very easy for you to clear yourself of that offence in the opinion of the public ; and I think, Sir, that it would be in my power, to let out such a history of all our transactions, as would go near to make you fly the country. I don't say that you would suffer any thing from the law ; but you would certainly lose your character ; and a character is of too much consequence to a gentleman in your situation, for you to run the risk of injuring it, merely for the sake of punishing a poor man like me, even though I had offended you ever so much. On this account, Sir, I don't think that you will ever bring me to trial for the forgery, and I have determined to brave the consequences of resisting your orders."

There was something in the dogged, business-like calmness of this defiance, which made it as formidable as it was annoying. At the same time, there was a studied ingenuity in the as-

signment of the motives of Allen's present conduct, which brought fresh evidence to Sackville's mind, that Allen was guilty of the removal of the forged paper. How to reply to him was a difficult question. Fraud and flattery would be equally unavailing, and would tend to raise the demands of his antagonist, by a tacit confession of weakness. To persuade, was hopeless ; it was better if possible to bully. Allen was probably ignorant of the extent of Sackville's information, and a sudden announcement of it, might perhaps awe him into submission.

"Allen," said the latter, "your reasons do credit to your ingenuity ; but they are not the real ones. I know them, and will tell them"—then after a pause, calculated to give effect to his words, he added in a tone of impressive solemnity, "I accuse you of having, on the morning of the sixteenth, a little after midnight, burglariously entered my house at Trentford, and stolen from thence the forged paper, which I

had in my possession. This I know, and from evidence of the strongest kind. That evidence I shall not detail; but you may have reason to rue its accuracy, if you persist in your present opposition to my wishes."

Allen received this terrible accusation with an air of evident confusion; but it was the confusion of astonishment, rather than of guilt, and was scarcely more than might have been evinced, under such circumstances, by an innocent person. When he first spoke, it was to request, with an admirable look of bewilderment, that Mr. Sackville would do him the favour to repeat what he had just said.

"I cannot understand you, Sir," said he, when he had heard it a second time, "I cannot for the life of me. It is no joking matter, and yet I can hardly think you in earnest. I ask you, Sir, do you seriously believe me to have stolen the paper?"

"I do," replied Sackville, sternly.

“ Very well—then I am to understand that the paper is missing ?”

Sackville was silent.

“ Silence gives consent,” resumed the other, with a coarse smile. “ This is good news for me—I am free—and now, Sir, we no longer stand upon the same terms as formerly.”

“ Perhaps not,” resumed Sackville, “ but they are little changed for your advantage. Your character is still in my power, and probably your life.”

“ My life is as safe as your’s, Sir ; and as for my character—you say it is in your power—yes, and your character is in mine: but upon that point the sooner we come to an understanding the better. To say that you can ruin my character is all very fine between ourselves ; but I would not advise you to try. If you are wise, you will not accuse me of this cock-and-bull robbery of the paper you have lost—no, nor of the old business of the forgery. Say nothing you can-

not support, or you shall find what it is to meddle with people's reputations. I know that the law can give me redress, and the law shall—and if you were to speak against me, I would bring my action for defamation, as soon as look at you. As for your trial, and your proofs, and your evidence of a robbery that never existed, I laugh at them, Sir—I laugh at them. It is easy enough to spread slander, but it is not so easy, in a court of justice, to substantiate a lie. Besides, supposing, for argument's sake, that I had actually committed the robbery you talk of, I should like to know, Sir, how you would indict me? What is the value of the forged paper? How would you describe it? How will you account for your possession of such a paper? and who will you bring to swear that it ever existed? And supposing (which is very improbable) that you could succeed in convicting me, how would your character bear my true account of all the transactions that have passed between us! No, Sir, silence would be your safest

course, even if I *had* stolen the paper, and would confess it here before a witness. And now, as for the forgery, Sir, of which I do confess myself guilty ; as you seem to have lost the only proof, let me advise you never to mention it. I cannot suffer attacks upon my character. It stands very clear with the world at large, and I am determined to keep it so. Therefore, Sir, take notice—if I ever find, that you have even so much as hinted what you know of that affair, I shall think it a duty—a duty which I owe to myself, and my family—to defend myself by bringing an action against you. You need not look so angry, Sir. I speak for your sake as much as for my own ; for if you should be so imprudent as to talk, I dare say the law will allow me to redress myself, pretty handsomely, at your expense.”

“ Admirable !” exclaimed Sackville, goaded beyond the bounds of forbearance. “ And have you the effrontery to say this to *me*?—me, who have seen you so long in your true colours, and

know what a poor, mean, shuffling scoundrel you are? and to threaten *me* with the consequences of speaking the *truth*! I thought I had known you; but this pitch of impudence exceeds all I could have believed."

"Now, Sir, you talk like a gentlemen," said Allen, with the most insulting composure. "I could stand for an hour and listen to you. I am not in any hurry, Sir; you may go on abusing me."

There was something in the calm derision of Allen's words and manner, more insupportably galling to Sackville, than the utmost vehemence of invective could have been. Though endued with strong powers of self command, he could not controul the expression of his rage.

"Leave the house," said he, "infernal villain!" and scarcely could he restrain his hands from an act of violence.

But nothing could ruffle the composure of Allen. "We are alone, Sir," said he with a

sneer, as he coolly smoothed the brim of his hat, "and calling names is mere child's play ; but when you speak to me next, Mr. Sackville, say something actionable before witnesses, and I shall be obliged to you. Good day, Sir ;" and once more surveying Sackville from head to foot, with a smile of defiance, he turned round, and left the room.

Never yet had Sackville experienced feelings so bitter as those which this interview had excited. He had been thwarted, defied, insulted, by the man whose words and actions were lately subservient to his will, and who could scarcely be said to live but by his permission. He had been proved inferior in address, in confidence, and in temper, to one who was greatly below him in station, and in all those mental acquirements, of which Sackville had most reason to be proud. But he had stooped from his height to be this man's associate in guilt, and he felt, too late, that guilt had levelled all

distinctions. He felt too that all those endowments which would have aided his advancement in a worthier career, now redounded to his disadvantage. They were but clogs that impeded his descent into those miry paths of villainy which he had demeaned himself to tread.

Bad as he was, he had still some gentlemanly scruples, some faint feeling of honour, which tended only to weaken him in the conflict with one who had none; and he found at length, that he was contending with a wretch, who like the unjust steward in the parable, was "wiser in his generation." These thoughts occurred to Sackville, and raging, in his bosom, formed "the proper hell" of baffled wickedness.

When his anger cooled, he had also to accuse himself of folly, in having allowed Allen to depart, without having again endeavoured to treat for the delivery of the letters. His plan of terrifying him into submission had evidently

failed, and it was, therefore, necessary to have recourse to gentler methods. It, however, appeared to Sackville, upon more mature consideration, that such methods could be tried with a greater prospect of success in the course of another interview, and that in the mean while his threats might have had more effect than Allen was willing to admit.

In this conjecture, Sackville was right. Allen was not so regardless of Sackville's threats to bring him to trial for the burglary at Trentford, as he affected to be. He did not know that Sackville might not be in possession of powerful evidence, or even that a confession might not have been extorted from his accomplice; but he knew that, at all events, there was nothing to be gained, and much to be hazarded—by immediate submission, or even by an appearance of irresolution and fear. The soundest policy urged him to assume the attitude of innocence and security. This, if Sackville's threats were destitute of foundation, would enable him to persevere in

his exorbitant demands ; if not, and danger was really to be feared, it would be equally easy to conciliate Sackville at a more advanced stage of the business.

CHAPTER XV.

Which is the villain?—let me see his eyes,
That when I note another man like him,
I may avoid him.

Much ado about Nothing.

AFTER watching the struggles and broodings of guilt, we will now turn to the more agreeable contemplation, of the steps pursued by Lacy for vindicating his injured honour. He had now learnt that Mr. Morton suspected him of having behaved with the basest treachery—of having, at the time of his frank and friendly declaration on the hustings, secretly participated in a plot, which was to secure him the election, by plunging his opponent into ruin and disgrace. He did Mr. Morton the justice to believe, that these injurious suspicions had not been gratuitously

assumed. He believed them to have been suggested by others; and it was now his task to unravel the tissue of misrepresentations by which those suggestions had been conveyed. He preferred, for the prudential reasons which we have mentioned above, to effect his justification without communicating with Mr. Morton, but to prove the absence of all collusion from the confessions of those by whom the legal process had been conducted.

In this investigation he was favoured by accident. He had been applied to, by a person of the name of Wilkinson, for his recommendation and assistance in procuring an office then vacant in the county. The applicant hinted in his letter, which was worded rather obscurely, that this request, if granted, would not be the first obligation he had received; but hoped, that he should not be considered altogether an undeserving object. To this Lacy replied by professing his ignorance of any other favour that he had conferred, or cause that existed for

it—declining to recommend without a knowledge of the qualification of the parties, and declaring that, *cæteris paribus*, he must support the application of another person.

It was soon after the dispatch of this answer, that Lacy left London for Wichcombe. One of his objects, when in that neighbourhood, was to see the attorney employed against Mr. Morton, and the creditor who sued him for debt, and to discover if they had any knowledge of the existence of such an injurious opinion as Mr. Morton seemed to entertain. A short inquiry soon informed him that the creditor of Mr. Morton, and the man of the name of Wilkinson, who had lately written to him, were one and the same person. Wilkinson lived at no great distance from Wichcombe, and no sooner had he heard of Lacy's arrival in that town, than he came over to see him, full of indignation at the unfavourable manner in which his application had been met.

“I am not a Wichcombe voter, Sir,” said

the man ; “ but I think I deserve some encouragement, for all that ; for I can make bold to say that I have done you a good turn, and at the last election too.”

“ Explain yourself,” said Lacy.

“ Oh, there is no need of that : you know well enough, Sir, that I was the person who sent the bailiffs to Dodswell, and made Mr. Morton give up the contest.”

“ I know it *now*,” said Lacy.

The man smiled at the implied denial of having known it before.

“ Even if that circumstance had gained me the election,” pursued Lacy, “ which it did not, for I was at the head of the poll before it occurred, I should be very sorry that it should be considered any reason for my favouring or assisting you.”

“ Oh, certainly, Sir,—” replied the man, with an odd look of intelligence, “ it need not be *considered* so ; but you know it *is* a reason between ourselves.”

“No,” said Lacy, rather indignantly, “I deny that, with me, it either is or will be so.”

Wilkinson again smiled, and was silent. Lacy was struck with his manner, and determined not to neglect so fair an opportunity of pursuing his intended inquiry. “You seem,” said he, to Wilkinson, “not to believe me. You seem to think, I know not why, that a secret understanding exists between us: your letter conveyed that impression, and your words and manner express the same: this is to me a mystery, and I wish to break through it: speak out, plainly and boldly, and let us have done with hints and inuendos.”

Wilkinson looked puzzled. “Oh, very well, Sir—as for that—I can have no objection to speak out plainly and boldly to you; I only thought you did not wish it.”

“And why so?”

“Because, Sir, you know very well that you don’t like to *seem* to know any thing about the matter.”

“ About what matter ? ”

“ Lord ! Sir !—why, begging your pardon, what can be the use of keeping up these sort of pretences among ourselves ?—as if we did not both of us know that you were at the bottom of my proceedings against Mr. Morton ! ”

Lacy’s astonishment at this intimation was extreme. He knew that gross deceit must have existed in some quarter, but he had no suspicion of its having been employed upon the suing creditor himself. The investigation which followed brought to light much of the scandalous arts which had been used to deceive him. It appeared that he had been urged, partly by anonymous letters, partly by the actual intervention of Allen, so to arrange the execution of the writ as to distress Mr. Morton in the midst of the election. This being done, he was informed by Allen, that he had conferred a favour upon Mr. Lacy, which would not soon be forgotten ; that the plan had his approbation, and that he was the writer of the anonymous

letters. At the same time, Wilkinson was informed, that Mr. Lacy was one of those affectedly squeamish persons who, though very willing to profit by the misdeeds of others, are loth to admit their concurrence in them, or even their fore-knowledge and tacit approbation. He was therefore warned that he would give serious offence, and forfeit the support of Mr. Lacy, if he ever wounded his delicacy by alluding to the part which he bore in the transaction, or even to his own services. He was assured that he would reap the profit of this courtly forbearance, and would gain nothing by the opposite course.

The former assurance seemed soon to be verified. Wilkinson wished to obtain for his son a place in the Excise. Allen was made the depositary of his intentions, and became his adviser in the mode of proceeding. Instructed by Sackville, he counselled him not to make a direct application to Lacy, but to draw up a memorial, which would be placed by Allen in

the hands of that gentleman. This was never done ; on the contrary, the application was entrusted to Sackville, and, through his exertions, was successful.

Meanwhile, the applicant was made to believe that, for this success, he was indebted not to Sackville, but to Lacy ; and in order to prevent the discovery of his error, he was warned not to send to Mr. Lacy any letter of acknowledgment, but to express his gratitude to that gentleman through the medium of a letter to Allen, which he would find an opportunity of showing. This letter was never shown to Lacy, and it was obtained with a different intention ; it was to be shown to Mr. Morton, and became the means of confirming in his mind the belief of Lacy's treachery.

Lacy could not obtain from Wilkinson a knowledge of this latter circumstance, nor was he yet aware of the extensive part which Sackville had taken in the organization of this plot. He could only be made acquainted with the

agency of Allen ; but he doubted not that he was employed by another ; and his suspicions wavered between Lord Rodborough and Sackville. The latter was not connected with the borough ; but he appeared, even on the showing of Wilkinson, to have some share in the transaction ; and Lacy, who now began to take a truer estimate of his character, could easily conceive that jealousy might prompt Sackville to endeavour to injure him in the opinions of the Mortons.

The anger and surprise of the unfortunate Wilkinson, in finding that he had been so completely duped, was much more violently expressed than the more just indignation of Lacy. Fortunately for Lacy, the former was so much incensed against Allen, for having rendered him so blind a tool, that he gladly consented to lend his assistance in unmasking that person and in undeceiving Mr. Morton. He went home to commence a search for written proofs of Allen's delinquency ; and returning to Wichcombe,

placed in Lacy's hands one of the anonymous letters which had been attributed to him, and also a letter from Allen, which, though not explanatory, contained sufficient allusions to afford a strong confirmation of the statements of Wilkinson. The anonymous letter bore the mark of the post town, nearest to Lacy Park, and was an excellent imitation of Lacy's hand. In delivering up these letters, Wilkinson gave Lacy full permission to make of them whatever use he pleased; and he also consented to accompany him to town.

Lacy arrived in London on the evening of that day which witnessed the last interview between Sackville and Allen. Having matured his plan of operations, he went, early the following morning, to the house where Allen was residing. He resolved to try the efficacy of a surprise in a private conference with that person. He succeeded in finding Allen alone; and then, without preparing him by any preamble for that which was to follow, placed before

him the anonymous letter, and demanded whether he had ever seen it before. Allen knew it well, and could not forbear starting with evident consternation, at the unexpected sight. However, he quickly recovered himself, and began to disclaim all knowledge of the letter : but it was done with awkwardness and hesitation, for he felt that his manner had betrayed him, and that he had evinced a surprise, which could never have appeared if he had not seen the letter before. Nevertheless, he was proceeding with his denial, when Lacy stopped him.

“Allen,” said he, sternly, “this is useless. I know what has passed, as my possession of this letter may convince you. I have also another written by you, which I obtained from Wilkinson. He has told me everything, and I have brought him to town, that he may lay the circumstances, if necessary, before my solicitor. Your safest course is to make a full declaration of all you know ; and in that case, and that only, your conduct may be overlooked. I am

aware that my character has been shamefully attacked ; but as I do not yet know that it has been injured in the opinion of any except Mr. Morton, I shall be satisfied with an explanation before him, without having recourse to law ; but I shall certainly avail myself of that method of redress, if you refuse to make a full confession. I believe that you have not been acting simply on your own account, but are the instrument of some other person, and I demand to be told, in the first instance, who that person is."

Allen looked frightened and abashed ; but his habitual caution did not desert him. " I hope, Sir," said he, " you will excuse me, if I don't answer you immediately. Whether a man is innocent or guilty, it is never prudent to reply off-hand, to these kind of questions. You seem to threaten me with an action. Now, Sir, if a man were to threaten me with an action, even in a case where the right was clearly on my side, I should think myself very impudent, if I were to snap my fingers, and

tell him to do his worst. It is not pleasant to get into law, whether one wins or loses. I would always take time for consideration; and therefore, Sir, I hope you will not be offended at my proposing, that when I have heard all you wish to say, I may be allowed to wait upon you in the course of a few hours with my answer."

"To that," replied Lacy, "I shall not agree. Either you will go with me from hence to Mr. Morton's, and explain in his presence the part that you have taken, or I shall consider your silence as a refusal, and proceed with Wilkinson to my solicitor. You may decide at your leisure, but it shall be in my presence. I will have no consultations with confederates."

Lacy then turned away, and taking up a newspaper, left Allen to his own reflections.

That wary person was much embarrassed by Lacy's promptitude and firmness, and found himself unexpectedly brought into a situation of considerable difficulty. He took a rapid mental

survey of all that could be adduced in favour of the policy, either of submission or resistance; and found that there was most to be said for the former. It was true, that in that case he must forfeit all chance of extorting money from the fears of Sackville; but a late interview had taught him, that such expectations were but slightly founded. He had already quarrelled with Sackville, and defied his powers; and in exposing him before Lacy and Mr. Morton, he should be gratifying one strong passion of his heart—revenge. He also knew that Sackville's credit was on the wane; and it therefore became advisable to dissolve all connection with a man who would so soon cease to be a creditable patron.

In failure of him, it was also desirable to attach himself to the service of some more eligible chief. Lacy was a rising man, of good expectations, and esteemed by the world; and if Allen could, by an earnest reparation of the injuries he had committed, and by apparent zeal for his

cause, induce Lacy to overlook the numerous attendant stains upon his honesty, and lend him his future countenance and protection, he might hope to derive no slight advantage. These were some of the sentiments that flashed across the mind of Allen, and they disposed him to make his peace with Lacy, and to lay open the iniquities of Sackville.

This important step was immediately taken ; and in a short time Lacy became possessed of a complete knowledge of the various arts which had been employed against him, by the man whom he once thought his friend. When Allen had opened his communications, he took care to gain some credit to himself, by making them full and satisfactory, and extending them to every particular in which Lacy was likely to be interested. They therefore embraced not only the machinations of which Lacy seemed the immediate object, but those by which Sackville had effected his engagement with Miss Morton.

Deep was the disgust and indignation of Lacy, as this dark picture of subtle villainy was gradually unfolded. His surprise was less ; for it could hardly be said that the truth had burst upon him unexpectedly. The communication did but serve to confirm previous suspicions of foul play, for which he had formerly reproached himself, and which he had tried to dismiss, as illiberal and ungrounded.

But it was now no time to dwell on retrospects. The present emergency called for action. The course of explanation was only begun, and much misunderstanding was still to be removed, between Lacy and Mr. Morton. A letter was immediately sent to the latter, by Lacy, from Allen's abode. It requested, in pressing terms, the favour of an admission to an immediate conference, and without entering into any explanatory details, briefly signified its important object.

A favourable answer was returned ; and Lacy, attended by Allen and Wilkinson, repaired to the house of Mr. Morton.

CHAPTER XVI.

Telle est la force d'un sentiment vrai que, lorsqu'il parle, les interprétations fausses et les convenances factises se taisent.

B. CONSTANT. *Adolphe.*

To detail the progress of the investigation which took place in the presence of Mr. Morton, would be merely to recapitulate circumstances with which our readers are already acquainted. Suffice it to say that, in the course of that conference, the artifices of Sackville were completely unmasked, and the integrity of Lacy established, in a manner that carried entire conviction to the mind of Mr. Morton.

Sackville, meanwhile, remained in ignorance of the event which tended so materially to affect

his views; and knew not that, in one hour, the specious fabric of artifice, which he had so long and anxiously reared, had crumbled to dust beneath the touch of truth. Such had been the promptitude of Lacy's proceedings, that the interviews with Allen and with Mr. Morton had both taken place, before Sackville knew that he was returned to London.

On the morning after Sackville's last angry conference with Allen, he was engaged with business, and obliged to forego an intended visit to the Mortons. Having, however, dispatched his affairs, he was on the point of bending his course towards the residence of the Mortons, when a packet was put into his hand. It was in Mr. Morton's hand-writing; and Sackville, on perusing it, found, with shame and dismay, that it contained a full and circumstantial statement of many of those parts of his past conduct which he was most desirous of concealing. The communication was also accompanied with copies of those letters and papers, the possession

of which he had been so anxious to obtain from Allen. In short, the exposure seemed to have been complete ; and the concluding part of the letter showed that the impression made by it upon the sentiments of Mr. Morton, was of the most unfavourable kind. It refused to admit Sackville to a personal conference, until he had sent, in writing, a denial of the truth of the allegations made against him and of the authenticity of the letters and papers which supported them.

“ If,” pursued Mr. Morton, “ you cannot make this denial, and also establish its correctness ; if you cannot remove the opinion, which (though much against my will) I am now bound to entertain, by contrary testimony of as powerful a description ; if you cannot impugn the veracity of Allen, it is almost needless for me to say that we can no longer meet on the same terms as formerly, and it will be better for both of us if we never meet again. Your character must be thoroughly cleared from every stain

that has been cast upon it by the disclosures which I transmit to you, before I can admit you to an alliance with my family. My daughter, who is informed of all, will, if she does not see you justified, assuredly dissolve her engagement ; and were she disposed to act otherwise, I myself should interpose the authority of a parent to save her from an union with dishonour."

In these few concluding sentences Sackville viewed the extinction of those hopes which he had so long and fondly cherished. He was debarred from the only means by which he could hope to retrieve his lost credit. The adventitious aids of manner and address, his persuasive sophistry, and artful insinuation, which could have been employed so effectually in a personal conference, were peremptorily denied him ; and he was bidden, in a spirit of stern justice, to combat facts by facts, and rest his defence upon a plain, unvarnished statement of the truth. He meditated long upon the

possibility of accomplishing his vindication in the undelusive method that had been prescribed, and, with bitter repining, acknowledged that it was hopeless. He felt that, from that moment, his engagement with Agnes was virtually dissolved. He was defeated: but ever mindful of securing to himself every possible advantage, no sooner had he made this mortifying acknowledgment, than he resolved to turn upon his accusers, and assume the lofty air of injured rectitude and proud defiance.

His answer to Mr. Morton was written in this spirit. "I scorn," said he, "to reply to the mass of calumnies which have been levelled against me—I shall not stoop to expose them. They are too flimsy to have weight in the mind of any one who does not wish to believe them true. Little did I imagine that even an enemy could be found who would so greedily receive them—still less that they would be entitled to immediate credit from the man who has so long professed himself my friend. But it seems that

I have been grievously deceived. You say true, Sir, ‘we can no longer meet on the same terms as formerly, and it will be better for both of us if we never meet again.’ I thank you for speaking so plainly on the subject of my intended marriage with your daughter. Sincerity has come late; but I am glad that it should have appeared at all. You had a wound to inflict, and you have done it with an unshrinking haste, which does credit to your firmness and decision, and which my worst foe might have reason to admire. You have not scrupled to profess your willingness to discard me, even before you have heard my vindication. You hint that Agnes is no less willing to think ill of me than yourself, and I am not permitted to have any other testimony than your assurance. If true, it is a cruel return for years of love and zealous devotion. The intimation is, without doubt, meant to wound me deeply, and it does. But I will make no parade of what I feel.

“Little as my feelings have been consulted,

I am still desirous to spare yours. I will save you, Sir, the painful task of interposing the 'authority of a parent' to save your daughter from 'an union with dishonour.' I resign the prospect of her hand. My wife she can never be, after that which you have thought proper to declare ; but as long as my influence lasts, you must not expect me to consent to her becoming the wife of another. I owe it to myself to express, in this manner, my sense of the treatment I have received. I might have expressed that sense of my wrongs more harshly ; I might have allowed the breach of our contract—a written contract, which I have in my possession—to have proceeded entirely from your daughter ; and the law would have given me my revenge. But, meanly as you may prize me, I have too much delicacy and honour to drag her name before the public, and render the history of our past engagement a subject for the retailers of scandalous gossip and the purveyors of a licentious press."

Thus wrote Sackville, after an exposure against which he could not defend himself, which blasted his character, destroyed his hopes, and ought to have covered him with shame and confusion. He had endeavoured, and not unsuccessfully, to assume the proud bearing of conscious virtue. He knew that he was opposed by facts; but his was the effort of desperation. The difficulties of his situation inspired him with a kind of reckless energy, and he resolved to swagger himself out of the galling sense of his own debasement.

Experience too often teaches us that outward signs of shame and humiliation are not necessarily attendant upon detected guilt. It is not to be supposed that depraved characters have that sensitive consciousness of their situation which honourably minded persons, judging from their own sentiments, naturally imagine them to feel. Neither is it to be supposed that, even if they did feel much, they would suffer it

to become apparent. It is not likely that the dissimulation and sophistry of which a person has long availed himself, should desert him at his utmost need ; or that, when reduced to the resource of his own address, that address should not be powerfully exerted in covering his defeat.

It is among the trials of our state, that neither does the course of guilt appear so hateful, nor its punishment so severe and certain, as we conceive it ought to be ; and that the acknowledged villain shall walk through the world with as bold a carriage as his honest neighbour, shaking the confidence of the feebly virtuous, and dispensing encouragement to the minor scoundrels that strive to emulate his audacity. But let it not be imagined that where no punishment is seen to fall, it will necessarily follow that none is felt. Let not the probable existence of “that within which passeth show,” be utterly forgotten. Let it rather be believed, that the wound is most severe in him who labours most

to hide it ; and that he is not least a prey to secret shame, who most proudly blazons his contempt of censure.

Sackville's audacious spirit of retaliation was not confined to the letter from which we have given the foregoing extract. On the following morning he called upon Lacy, whom he found alone. He entered with a reserved and lofty air, and met Lacy's eye with a firmness that induced the latter to believe at first that he was still ignorant of the disclosures that had taken place.

But Sackville's first words undeceived him. Drawing himself up into an attitude of defiance, and fixing his eyes upon Lacy, with a most severe and appalling scrutiny, he sternly demanded,

"Mr. Lacy, do you believe that I have injured you?"

The reply was given in one word—"Yes."

Then followed a pause—a pause of expectation in Lacy, of surprise and embarrassment

on the part of Sackville. The latter was quite disconcerted by the unexpected plainness and brevity of Lacy's answer. He had formed for Lacy, in his own mind, a very different reply, to which he had provided a pointed and powerful rejoinder; but that decisive monosyllable had rendered all his tactics useless. Nevertheless, his usual promptitude in resources did not desert him.

"I admire your sincerity, Sir," said he to Lacy, "though I think your opinions might have been somewhat more charitable. I am then to understand that, on the word of a rascally land-surveyor, you are willing to believe that I have acted dishonourably, though you have not yet heard my defence."

"Yes," again replied Lacy; "but I wish to hear that defence, and shall be glad to find reason for changing my opinion."

"And do you think, Sir," retorted Sackville, scornfully, "that I came here with the paltry object of defending myself against the calum-

nies which a low-born miscreant may choose to utter, and which you, in your charity, may think proper to believe ?”

“ I cannot tell what is your object,” said Lacy ; “ but if it had been to correct a misrepresentation, I could not have considered it a paltry or unworthy one. If I am in error, I am sorry for it ; and still more that you should wish me to remain so. I may reasonably regret that so little value is put upon my good opinion.”

“ Doubtless, you may,” replied Sackville, with a sneer ; “ but you need not let that wound your pride. I should not prize the good opinion of any man, were he the best and greatest in the land, if that good opinion could be resigned as easily as yours has been. I repeat, Sir, I do not come here to defend myself ; but, I do not choose that you or any man should construe my silence into shame or fear, or suppose that, because I scorn to reply, I am willing to acknowledge the justice of all the slander that has

been uttered against me. I can face my accusers, and boldly too, as you can testify; and I leave you to judge, whether that would have been the case, if all were true that is said against me. Mark my words, Mr. Lacy, the time may come when you will repent of having so willingly thought ill of me. I will not boast of what you owe me—let your own conscience tell you that. Meanwhile, pursue your own course. I am no humble suitor for your gratitude—no, nor for your silence. If you wish to trumpet forth the history of your imaginary wrongs, do it. If you wish to extol your own forbearance, while you are reviling me behind my back in every company you enter, do it. If you wish to blacken the character of one to whom you owe more than you ever can repay, in the name of all that is mean, treacherous, and ungrateful, do it. Say your worst—I do not fear it. My reputation stands too firm to be shaken by a word of your's. The mischief will only recoil upon the heads of its agents.

Use your tongue freely and boldly—I shall not call you to account. It would do me little credit to be killed by you, and my principles will not allow me to take a life which I once saved.”

The object of this violent and galling speech was not only to assume the proud security of conscious innocence, but to irritate Lacy into some unguarded act or expression, which might give Sackville an advantage over him. But Lacy, though, perhaps, not qualified to contend with Sackville in subtlety, had that firmness of principle, and rectitude of intention, which stood him in better stead than art. He regarded Sackville when he had ended, with a steadiness, before which the eye of the latter momentarily fell.

“Mr. Sackville,” he said, “what creditable purpose can this bravado serve? If you wished to insult and give me pain, you have succeeded; but if you wished to goad me into revengeful violence and forgetfulness, you have not suc-

ceeded, nor ever shall. I have volunteered no charge against you, and I ask you for no reparation. The injury that was done, has already been repaired without your interposition; and my desire, from that moment, was to forget that you had ever been my enemy. You are safe, Sir, from all attacks of mine, and I shall never, henceforth, breathe a syllable to your disadvantage. I am inclined to believe that you were conscious of your safety, and secretly did me the justice to think that I should not act so mean a part. In either case, it would have been more generous and noble, to have withheld your taunts. You might also have withheld your allusion to a duel, and your attempted reflection on my courage, which I heartily despise, and, as you well know, with reason. It argued little of the magnanimity to which you lay claim, to have boasted reproachfully of the service you once afforded me. You did me a cruel injustice in assuming that I required to be reminded of it. I can never forget it, and I

must always be grateful. You have done much, and you may do more, to lessen that gratitude; but nothing ever ought to extinguish it. You have cruelly sported with my character, and belied me with those whose esteem I had most reason to value. You have embittered many a past hour. You have done that which might have caused me to hate you; but I thank God I do not, nor will I ever injure you, if I can help it."

Sackville seemed moved. A flush of upbraiding shame passed hastily across his features. A severe internal struggle appeared to agitate his mind, and he turned away to conceal its visible indications from the eye of Lacy.

"I am sensible, Sir," said he, at length, with a more softened manner, and in a tone of mournful seriousness, "that the term of our intimacy has come to a close. After I have quitted this room, we may never meet again; we shall certainly never speak to each other; but I will not leave you with the impression

that I have not the courage to confess my faults. I acknowledge that I *have* injured you."

He then requested a pen and paper, and sat down to write. His letter (for such it seemed) was very short, and occupied him only a few minutes. When he had finished, he sealed it; and having written on the outside, placed it in Lacy's hands. In lieu of direction, were the following words:—"To be opened by Mr. Lacy, only in the presence of Mr. Morton, and not until he has received express permission in writing from me. E. SACKVILLE."

Lacy read these words with surprise, and looked at Sackville, as if to request an explanation.

"I see," said the latter, "that you think my conduct strange, and perhaps suspicious; but it will be satisfactorily explained whenever that paper shall be opened. But before I leave it in your hands, I must require your solemn promise never to open it but in the presence of

Mr. Morton, after having received permission from me. You must also promise, that should I at any time require you to destroy this paper, you will instantly burn it unopened."

Lacy promised to fulfil either injunction faithfully.

"I know," added Sackville, "that I am dealing with a man of honour, and that when your word is given, it will be kept. I do not know whether the confidence I now place in you deserves to be considered as any reparation for the pain I may once have caused you. If I were to say so, I should, perhaps, be rating much too highly the value of my own good opinion. At any rate, Sir, I am glad that the last opinion of your character, which you will now hear me utter, should be so favourable. I hope it will prove just. Farewell!"

So saying, he suddenly turned away, and before Lacy was aware of his intentions, and could return that adieu which was to be their last, Sackville had left him.

CHAPTER XVII.

Beseech you, Sir, be merry ; you have cause
(So have we all) of joy ; for our escape
Is much beyond our loss.

Tempest.

PREVIOUS to the foregoing interview between Lacy and Sackville, Sackville's letter had been received by Mr. Morton, and Agnes had been told that she was free. The announcement was received with deep and overpowering emotion ; and after a vain struggle to controul her feelings, she burst into tears. They were tears neither of sorrow nor of joy ; they were the overflowings of an oppressed and agitated spirit, which no longer sought to struggle against the weakness of its nature, when the exertion of

self-command was no longer necessary, and the time of trial was past.

But joy did succeed to these emotions when their bitterness had subsided, and allowed her to reflect on her present happier situation ; and fervently did she thank Heaven for having saved her from that most sure and enduring of human evils—a marriage without affection.

Lacy, at the time of his interview with Sackville, was not informed of all that had passed between him and the Mortons. He knew not that Sackville had renounced all further communication with that family, and that his engagement with Agnes was dissolved. This interesting fact became known to him only after the lapse of many days, and through the information of a common acquaintance, who had heard it from Lord Malvern. Subsequent reports confirmed the first, and Lacy was soon relieved from all doubt upon the subject.

Believing that Agnes had never felt any affection for Sackville, and was engaged to

him against her wishes, Lacy sincerely rejoiced in her deliverance. But he could not feel that his own prospects were materially brightened. He was pledged to Miss Hartley, and though he did not love her, he had too much honour even to meditate the desertion of her for another. Still he reflected that one great barrier was removed, that there was now no insuperable obstacle, and that Agnes might possibly become his, could he resolve to be so cruel and perfidious as to break his faith with Charlotte Hartley. She had now no guarantee but the firmness and rectitude of his resolution, and he vowed that she should not find it wanting.

But Lacy did not confide presumptuously in his own strength of principle, but felt the necessity of employing every method that occupation and absence could afford, to overcome his attachment to Agnes. He knew that her presence must now be doubly dangerous to him, and he formed the painful determination of never seeing her again till he was married to

Miss Hartley. He even meditated quitting London, lest he should accidentally meet her in society : but this intention was rendered needless, by an arrangement which was made by the Mortons themselves.

After the quarrel with Sackville, the intended departure of the Mortons to the Continent, which was to have taken place immediately, was postponed till the middle of summer, and an offer was made them, which would enable them to pass the intervening time more pleasantly than in their humble dwelling in London. The Duke of Swansea, whose intended nuptials we announced some time ago, had lately married, and after passing the first half of his honey moon at a villa at Twickenham, had gone with his bride abroad. On this occasion, the Duke, not knowing the intentions of the Mortons to travel, good naturedly offered them the use of his villa, and they, having now changed their plan, gladly closed with the proposal. They accordingly quitted town for

Twickenham, and signified their intention of remaining there till they went abroad.

This circumstance, with which Lacy became acquainted, was sufficient to remove his fears of meeting Agnes again in London. But this was a cruel and melancholy cause for satisfaction ; and Lacy could not suppress some bitter repinings, even when he felt that he ought to rejoice. He allowed that it was better that they should be far apart ; but when he considered that she was soon to go into a foreign land ; that seas were to divide them, and that she might probably stay many years, nay, perhaps die abroad, and that he might never see her more ; he could not bear the picture that he had formed, and his eyes filled with tears at the melancholy thought.

He resolved (it was a foolish project, as he half allowed, but he could not forego it), he resolved to discover the day of her departure, and shortly before it came, to see her for the last time. He did not mean to address her :

he did not even mean that she should see him. He meant, unperceived, to steal a last look at her whom he loved, to treasure up her image in his memory, and hurry back, and be wretched.

One morning, about a fortnight after Lacy's interview with Sackville, he received a letter, bearing the post-mark of a small town in the north of England, and written in a female hand. Lacy knew nobody in the neighbourhood from which it was sent, nor did he recognize either the seal, the hand, or the initials of the writer. It was a hasty scrawl, the substance of which, when decyphered, proved to be as follows : —

“ I hardly know whether you will be surprised or not when you hear of the step I have taken ; but I hope you will not have been quite deceived, for I think you must have suspected what my real sentiments were. I assure you it has not been my wish to behave disingenuously. I wanted, several months ago, to have

made the communication to you in confidence, but you would not let me, though I cannot help thinking that you almost knew what I was going to say. If that was the case, you can easily excuse me, as I shall not have been the only person to blame. I cannot, however, help feeling that, under all circumstances, you ought to receive the intimation sooner than anybody else, and this is the reason for my now venturing to write to you. I cannot say more at present, for I scarcely know how to address you upon such a subject; and, I assure you, it is very unpleasant for me to write at all, and I should not have done it, if I had not thought it proper."

Here followed the signature, which consisted solely of the letters C. L.

Lacy was completely puzzled. He could not divine the meaning of this mysterious note, nor could he discover its writer. He judged it to have come from a lady. It had all the neat and elegant characteristics of a female hand, so

easily distinguishable from that of a man, and yet so hard to be identified ; so small, and faint, and flowing, and, unlike the scrawls of the other sex, still beautiful when scarcely legible. There were the usual exuberant capitals, the flourishing heads of the *d*'s, and the long, curly tails of the *g*'s, *y*'s, *f*'s, and *z*'s ; the indistinguishable similarity of all the five vowels, and the common confusion of *n*'s and *m*'s with *u*'s and *w*'s. Lacy was acquainted with two ladies whose initials were C. L., but why either of them should write to him at all, much less so singular a letter, was more than he could comprehend. If it was a hoax, which he partly suspected, he could only say, that it was a very poor one.

At length, however, on his reading the letter over again, an idea suddenly flashed across his mind, which threw a new and singular light upon the circumstance. Doubts and suspicions arose, which he became inexpressibly anxious to satisfy, and he waited, in the most

eager suspense, for the arrival of the next day's post. It came, and brought the following letter from his sister.

“ MY DEAR HERBERT,

“ I have a very unpleasant task to perform. I am to acquaint you with an event which has caused no slight grief and surprise to us all, and at which I am sure none will be more astonished than yourself. Charlotte has left us. She went away on Tuesday without our knowledge, and is now married to Mr. Luscombe. I feel quite bewildered, and at times can hardly believe it true. Considering all circumstances, I own the step she has taken is beyond my comprehension. That she was once attached to you cannot be doubted, nor could I ever perceive that the attachment declined, or that the engagement was irksome to her. But you have probably seen more, and can explain what has happened better than I can. I fear that she at length perceived your indifference to her, and was driven by that

painful discovery to her present rash and unfortunate proceeding. If she has been influenced by pique, I am afraid she feels no attachment to the present object of her choice. I dread to think that such is the case, for it would be a terrible aggravation of the evils of this unfortunate affair.

“ I hope you cannot accuse yourself of having led to it, by any change of manner towards poor Charlotte. Though you may be glad of a release, I think you would be sorry to have purchased it at such a price. I trust, however, that she may still be happy. Angry as I must feel with Mr. Luscombe, for his treacherous and deceitful conduct, I cannot but admit that he has some pleasing qualities. He is fortunately not so much Charlotte’s superior in intellect as you would have been ; and there will be more of that equality which is essential to conjugal happiness. I fear he has been influenced, chiefly, by mercenary considerations, and has no real love for her : but she is of an easy

temper, and not romantic in her notions, and, provided he treats her well, will probably be satisfied with the mere decencies of moderate affection. I will do him the justice to say, that I think his natural obligingness will prevent him from ever being a harsh or unfeeling husband ; and, as Charlotte's intellectual wants are not extensive, I trust that good humour in a partner, will almost suffice to make her happy. It is a very different match from such as I could have wished for her, but the evil is now past remedy, and we must try to make the best of it.

“Charles is just returned from his fruitless pursuit. He saw his sister, who said that she had written to you. I wonder at it, but perhaps she thought that a letter would be some compensation for having used you so ill. I would have written sooner, but I did not like to send you any report till I knew the whole truth.

“I went over to Lacy yesterday, and saw my mother, who is very much afflicted at Charlotte's

elopement. What chiefly harasses her now, is the fear of a duel between you and Mr. Luscombe. I hope nothing of the kind is to be apprehended, and so I tell her, but she will not believe me. Pray write soon, and set her mind at ease. This unpleasant affair has obliged us to defer, for a short time, our coming up to town : but I hope you may find us there in the course of a fortnight."

Great was the surprise of Lacy at this unexpected release from his protracted state of thralldom. Serious as the event was, and disposed as he must be to regret the folly of an act which gave such displeasure to his nearest relations, he could scarcely resist a smile at Lady Lacy's fears lest he should call Luscombe severely to account. He even forgot all mortification at the deception which had been practised upon him, in thoughts of the happy prospects which his deliverance opened. He had been a prey to the most gloomy presages, the

most bitter regrets, and now all was sunshine. He might truly be said to have earned the happiness of the present moment, by the honourable firmness of his late resolutions. He had not sown the seeds of repentance, by wavering in his plighted faith to Charlotte Hartley, but could look back upon his past intentions with the honest glow of self-approval.

It is a galling thing to be jilted, especially when the jilting is accompanied with the breach of a positive engagement. Lacy knew that he had every possible right to be exceedingly indignant ; yet never did he experience the slightest anger, and when he called to mind the ambiguous conversation which he once held with Miss Hartley, and to which she alluded in her letter, he was rather inclined to laugh at the remembrance of their mutual misconception. The knowledge of her intended confession, served in some degree to acquit her, in his opinion, of the charge of deceit ; therefore the

weight of his displeasure, had he felt any, must have fallen upon Mr. Luscombe.

But Luscombe was not the sort of person against whom he could entertain a very lofty indignation. He also surmised, and very truly, that this gentleman was not unconscious of his real sentiments with regard to Miss Hartley ; and that he knew, that in carrying off that lady, he should not be robbing Lacy of a treasure, the loss of which he would very deeply resent.

That Miss Hartley should have preferred to Lacy, one so much his inferior in every respect as Luscombe, may at first appear strange ; but it is easily explained. It has been already sufficiently shown that she was not qualified to estimate the superiority of Lacy at its proper rate. On the other hand, she was quick enough to discover, in spite of Lacy's uniform kindness and civility of manner, that he did not care for her, nay more, that he despised her. It is difficult, perhaps impossible, to love, under circumstances like these : to some minds

it would be easier to hate. Indeed, it is not improbable that Miss Hartley might have been partly supported in her system of deceit, by the hope of proving her superiority in artifice, over one who had presumed to undervalue her capacity. She felt that her mind had little in common with Lacy's, whereas between herself and Luscombe, there was a constant congruity of sentiment, much of which was artfully assumed by the latter. She felt humbled before Lacy, but was elevated and flattered by the homage of Luscombe, who was all deference and attention. From the society of the latter, she derived constant pleasure ; from that of the former, much occasional entertainment, but always blended with a painful sense of inferiority.

When such was the case, it is not wonderful that she should have preferred the bland, obsequious Luscombe. Luscombe was the author of the deceitful course which Miss Hartley adopted towards Lacy, and of her eventual

elopement. He was not devoid of regard for her, nor was he insensible to her beauty, but his principal object was her fortune. He had little himself, and knew that in the event of an open courtship and proposal, he should be strongly opposed by her relations. Secrecy was therefore his only chance of success: and fortunately for his designs, he found Miss Hartley to be one of those weak, timid characters, who are naturally disposed to prefer dissimulation to openness, and seek to defend themselves by the resources of artifice.

Being an intimate acquaintance of her brother, Luscombe had frequent opportunities of seeing the young lady, and had secured her affections, and exchanged vows even before the period at which this story commences. But he had long to wait, for Miss Hartley would not be of age till the end of the ensuing April, and by a previous elopement he should fail in accomplishing his principal object. In the mean time, he contrived to blind her brother, and even the supe-

rior discernment of his lady, by affecting not to admire Miss Hartley, and professing himself a confirmed bachelor. With an admirable air of sincerity he concurred with the real wishes of Lady Lacy, and the pretended ones of Mrs. Hartley, that Herbert should be married to Charlotte; and when the engagement was actually announced, nobody spoke of it with greater pleasure both to them and their acquaintance.

This elopement was a severe and just punishment to Mrs. Hartley. Not only were her projects frustrated, but she was defeated with her own weapons, by persons whose talent and address she justly held to be inferior to her own. But in the ignominious warfare of cunning, the victory, as is meet, depends not upon those qualities of which any one has reason to be proud. The possession of high endowments is rather unfavourable to success. It induces a dangerous confidence, a disposition to bold and open measures, and a disregard of those petty

advantages of which meaner craft will not scruple to avail itself. Mrs. Hartley, it is true, was not calculated to feel the lofty security and noble unsuspectingness of her brother ; but she was undoubtedly led, by a consciousness of address, to place too great a reliance on her own discrimination, and to pay too little attention to the actions of Charlotte Hartley and Mr. Luscombe, from the very erroneous belief that, let them do what they would, they could never deceive her.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Wooing thee I found thee of more value
Than stamps in gold, or sums in sealed bags,
And 'tis the very riches of thyself
That now I aim at.

Merry Wives of Windsor.

THE time was now past when Lacy would consider it his duty to avoid the society of Agnes. All the serious obstacles which had opposed his love for her were now removed, and he accordingly made an early use of his newly acquired liberty, and called upon the Mortons at their residence at Twickenham. They had heard of Miss Hartley's marriage; and though scarcely any allusion could be made to such a subject, there was at least sufficient to satisfy Lacy that they were informed of his release.

He saw Agnes, and though it was but for a short time, and their conversation was unimportant, there was a conscious timidity in her manner towards him, and a blush on her cheek at the first meeting, from which he drew the happiest auguries. He staid long, and contrived to implicate himself in a commission for Lady Louisa, which would afford him an excellent reason for calling soon again. The second visit secured to Lacy a still greater degree of friendly intimacy with the family, and an invitation to dine with them *en famille* on a following day.

It was then, during the absence of the ladies after dinner, that the name of Sackville was first introduced, and in the course of conversation, Mr. Morton mentioned his office of trustee under the will of Mrs. Denham, and the power that he thereby possessed of withholding all, except ten thousand pounds, of the fortune of Agnes, in case of her marrying before the age of twenty-four without his consent.

“That consent,” added Mr. Morton, “he threatens to withhold; and after all that has passed it is absolutely impossible that we can ask him for it. My daughter, therefore, must not consider herself an heiress till her twenty-fourth year has expired. This is no family secret,” pursued he, “or I should not have mentioned it.”

There was nothing in the tone or expression of Mr. Morton which indicated that his communication had been made with a particular object. But Lacy could easily understand that Mr. Morton contemplated the possibility of a renewal of his addresses to Agnes, and had very honourably let fall, as if inadvertently, a piece of information which would prevent Lacy from being deceived, and if his views were merely mercenary, would put a stop to his pursuit. Lacy also thought that Mr. Morton’s declaration that the above fact was not a secret, might be received by him as a permission to communicate it to his father. Accordingly, in his next letter to Sir William, he stated that he still preserved his attachment

to Miss Morton, and that if no objection was made by his own family, he had reason to think that he had no further obstacle to apprehend. He confessed that it would be presumptuous to make sure of the lady's consent before he had offered his proposal, but he had seen enough to convince him that if there were difficulties, they were not insurmountable. He then mentioned the circumstances stated by Mr. Morton, and expressed some pleasure at the thought that Agnes should have no reason to believe that she was sought on account of any other motive than that of affection.

Lacy soon received an answer from his father, of which the following is a part.

“Do not expect me to be as liberally-minded as yourself. I shall not like Miss Morton a bit the better for having only ten thousand pounds instead of eighty thousand. But you need not let this alarm you. I shall like her well enough to allow her to be your wife—or rather, I like you well enough to allow you to

be happy in your own way. But as the question is one of money, it will be better for me to tell you the state of my circumstances, and the allowance that I can make you, and then you will be able to judge for yourself."

After some details, which it is needless to transcribe, the letter proceeded thus :

"You now know what you have to expect, and may shape your course accordingly. With the addition of ten thousand pounds to your allowance you may be comfortable—with eighty thousand, affluent. Weigh these circumstances well. Fix the amount of what you conceive to be a competency. Measure accurately your own disposition to contentment, and, if possible, that of your intended bride. Dismiss, for a moment, your visions of love, and in a cool, cold, worldly vein of prudence, think how far wealth is essential to your happiness. 'This being done, you may be once more as romantic as you please. Consider too, that, by your own showing, if you choose to wait four years, you may marry

Miss Morton without incurring the loss of the seventy thousand pounds. Reflect, then, for a moment, on the amazing prodigality of your love. Think that if you marry Miss Morton immediately, you and that lady will be expending, in attachment, the monstrous sum of seventeen thousand five hundred pounds per annum, which is much more than I humbly conceive any other pair of affections to be fairly worth. You will, perhaps, decide that your own are worth more, and I shall not quarrel with you, for nobody can be competent to settle that point but yourselves.

“ I again repeat—be cautious and considerate. Pursue a wise and even mean between the romantic disregard of money, and the illiberal pursuit of it; and know your own mind so thoroughly, that you may leave nothing to be discovered, when it is too late to retract. If you propose to Miss Morton, acquaint her father immediately with the extent of your promised allowance. Tell him, too, that I am informed of

the circumstances you mention, and let him not suppose, that I am desirous of your marrying for fortune."

After this liberal and favourable reply, it only remained for Lacy to urge his suit, and to obtain the consent of Agnes herself. But though he could not feel very diffident of success, he was nevertheless aware that delicacy required some caution and delay, and a due consideration of the circumstances, in which each of them were lately placed. However well he might know the truth, it would be too much for him to assume that Agnes had no affection for Sackville; and that so soon after a quarrel with one, whom she had almost engaged to love and honour, she was willing to outrage her former vows, by the acceptance of another person.

Almost similar was his own situation with reference to Miss Hartley, and there was this additional difficulty, that Agnes was not acquainted with the circumstances which had led to that engagement, and might, therefore, sup-

pose that it proceeded either from attachment on the part of Lacy, or what was worse, from mercenary motives. Either impression was unfavourable to his success, and it was difficult to conceive that Agnes should not entertain one of the two.

Such were the considerations which prompted Lacy, in spite of the impatient ardour of his love, to see Agnes frequently, before he risked his hopes in a proposal. Without employing a single expression indicative of attachment, he could easily cause her to perceive the enchaining pleasure which her society gave him, and he talked to her with an interest which could betoken nothing less than an approaching declaration: but he never saw her alone, and he could not introduce that subject which was nearest to his heart, without such an opportunity.

At length, however, the opportunity arrived. He found her one morning alone in the shrubbery which encircled the villa, and inclined, in

a gentle slope, towards the river. There was a cheerful beauty in the scene, which animated, and enlivened, and tended to dispel that feeling of reserve, which rendered an allusion to past events, not only difficult but painful. Lacy was enabled to mention in her presence, for the first time, the name of Miss Hartley, and failed not to avail himself of the introduction of such a subject, to tell her the origin and motives of his engagement, and the delusion in which he had remained.

Agnes heard him in silence, not unaccompanied with agitation, for she judged that a communication of so interesting a nature, could not be made without an object. Lacy observed every passing expression of her countenance, and could almost collect the import of her meditations.

“I hope,” said he, “you will not be surprised or displeased at my venturing to tell you so much of the history of my own feelings. I think you must have observed that I entertain

no common anxiety for your good opinion. The event which has happened, would, under any other circumstances, have been very painful to me; but you see that it is not, and I am sure you would have reason to think me a very unfeeling, cold-hearted person, if you did not know what my sentiments had been, and what it was that led to my engagement. Won't you allow that it would have been so—that, but for this explanation, you would have thought me cold-hearted and fickle?”

“Perhaps I should,” replied Agnes, timidly, and blushing as she spoke.

“And that,” pursued Lacy, “is the last character I should wish you to give me: but perhaps I have not cleared myself sufficiently, and you think me so still?”

“I am almost afraid to answer you,” said Agnes, “for I do not feel privileged to judge; but since you desire it, I will venture to say, that I think you can hardly be accused of fickle-

ness, since it appears, by your account, that you have always felt the same."

The countenance of Lacy brightened with pleasure at these words, and Agnes discovered, with confusion, that her expressions admitted of another application besides that which she intended. She was hastily attempting to qualify their meaning, when Lacy interposed.

"Do not," said he, "do not endeavour to unsay what is so true, and so delightful. I have indeed, always felt the same, since those happy days which I passed in your society at Huntley. Often have I been on the point of avowing it, and never has it been relinquished, even when your own engagement put a stop to every hope. Months then passed without my seeing you, and I became pledged to another, and I hoped, for it became a duty, that I had conquered my former feelings ; but I saw you again, and all my admiration and attachment was revived as strongly as before—I tried to forget you—but I could not, and now I know that I never can.

He had taken her hand, and she made no effort to withdraw it. Her face was turned away, and concealed by the other hand, and Lacy was not allowed to discover the emotion with which his declaration was received, but by the beautiful colour which suffused her neck. She made no reply ; but so delightful to Lacy was her silence, that he scarcely wished even for the sound of that sweet voice which to his ear was ever music. He knew that if his suit had seemed presumptuous, or been felt to be unwelcome, she would have spoken to repress him—but she had not, and he was at liberty to indulge in the delightful consciousness of being accepted, he could almost add, of being loved in return.

So encouraged, he ventured in still plainer terms to pour forth all the emotions of his heart, and to solicit that one rich reward which was to crown his happiness. He ceased, and heard, with inexpressible pleasure, the soft, low, tremulous accents of assent. He received the con-

fession, timid, but sincere and full, of corresponding attachment, and fervently kissed the hand that was henceforth to be ever his.

Lacy lost no time in informing Mr. Morton of the happy result of his interview with Agnes; and had the pleasure of receiving that gentleman's sanction and approval, and an assurance of the satisfaction with which he should regard him as a son-in-law. He then, in obedience to his father's wishes, proceeded candidly to lay before Mr. Morton the extent of his expectations, his own and his father's knowledge of the circumstance which would deprive Agnes of the greater part of her fortune, and Sir William Lacy's liberal avowal, that such a loss on the part of his son's intended bride, would by no means militate against his consent. Mr. Morton suitably acknowledged the liberality of these sentiments, and expressed his wish that the friendship between the families, so lately established, and then so soon dismissed, might henceforth never be disturbed.

The time for the marriage was now to be fixed;

and here Mr. Morton pleaded for delay. He reminded Lacy of the engagement from which Agnes had so lately been freed, and suggested the propriety of waiting at least beyond the time at which she was to have been united to Sackville ; and to this suggestion Lacy's delicacy forbade him to offer any opposition. Mr. Morton also hinted at the prudence of waiting till such a time as would secure to Agnes the benefit of her whole fortune ; but as this term of probation would amount to four years, he did not strongly press its adoption. Neither, if he had, would Lacy willingly have consented. He had obtained the sentiments of Agnes, and knew that she would not seriously regret the loss of so great a portion of her fortune, but be satisfied and happy in sharing with him diminished wealth, and gratified by so strong a practical assurance of being sought on account of endowments more intrinsic than those of fortune.

Of this assurance, more strong than words could convey, he vowed that nothing should deprive her. It was also a consolatory reflection

to both of them, that the wealth of which they should be thus deprived would not be lost to the family, or diverted to unworthy objects; but was to be divided among the brothers and sisters of Agnes: and this consideration confirmed them still more in their resolution not to allow the diminution of fortune to be any impediment to their union.

Immediate information of the intended nuptials of Lacy and Agnes was sent to Mr. Hawksworth, with a request of his sanction, as guardian and trustee. It was also requested, that since Mr. Morton had suspended all communication with Sackville, Mr. Hawksworth would forward these tidings to him, and at the same time, desire to be informed, whether it was Sackville's final determination to give or to withhold his consent. It was hoped that Mr. Hawksworth would make this demand plainly, and without urgency or any appearance of inreating a favour for the Mortons, and that he would add, that the refusal of Sackville's con-

sent would make no change in the intentions of the other parties, or delay the marriage for a single day.

This was accordingly done. The answer that Mr. Hawksworth received from Sackville was brief and unsatisfactory: without saying that his consent should be either given or withheld, it expressed wonder at having been applied to, and a request that he might not be addressed again upon such a subject. It was equivalent to a refusal; and Agnes was consequently compelled to look forward with resignation to the threatened forfeiture.

The Mortons were now preparing for their intended departure to the Continent. The approaching marriage of Agnes made no change in their plans. Lacy meant to follow them, and the marriage was to take place abroad, about the beginning of autumn.

One day, about a week before the time fixed for their journey, Lacy received a letter from Sackville. It contained merely these words:

“ I give you my permission to open, in the presence of Mr. Morton, the letter which I deposited in your hands at our last meeting.”

Lacy immediately availed himself of this interesting and at present inexplicable permission. He took the unopened letter to Mr. Morton, and after relating some of the attendant circumstances, broke the seal in his presence.

Well was he rewarded for the strictness with which he had observed the conditions of Sackville. In the mysterious paper, he read with surprise, the following words: “ If the engagement of marriage, now subsisting between Mr. Lacy and Miss Hartley, should at any future time be dissolved, and Mr. Lacy should make an offer of marriage to Miss Morton, and be accepted by that lady, I, Edward Sackville, guardian and trustee of Miss Morton, do freely consent that such marriage may be solemnized, and that Miss Morton shall be exempted from the forfeiture to be incurred, in case of my

non-approval, under the will of the late Mrs. Denham."

Below were a few lines addressed to Lacy, and which ran as follows: "You will perhaps be surprised at my manner of conveying this consent; you shall therefore know my reasons. I cannot, with propriety, openly advert to that event, which may never happen, and which, at this present time, circumstances seem imperatively to forbid. But I am nevertheless desirous to show you, that this consent, the greatest sacrifice of my own feelings that I have ever yet had the power to make, is not wrung from me by entreaty, nor is the tardy result of long consideration; that it is given in the only manner truly worthy of such a boon, is given promptly and unasked. I require only one favour in return; that neither you, nor any one whom this, my consent, can in any degree concern, will ever write to me on the subject. I do not know whether I have merited thanks; but if I have, I do not want them."

It is needless to expatiate upon the surprise and pleasure which this singular disclosure caused. The pleasure was lessened only by Sackville's refusal to accept of thanks, and his uncompromising tone of sullen pride, which seemed to spurn at the bare thought of reconciliation. He was unworthy of being again received on terms of friendship: but true generosity is slow to scan the errors of one who has conferred a benefit, and finds enmity painful even towards those whom it cannot esteem.

Immediately after the foregoing discovery, Lacy wrote to his father, and inclosed the singular letter that conveyed it. He received from Sir William Lacy the following, soon afterwards, in reply:—

“ MY DEAR HERBERT,

“ I thank you for sending me, so speedily, tidings which you knew would give me pleasure. You have proved your disinterestedness to the heart's content of all by whom you are known

and esteemed, as you deserve, and you may now take the gifts of fortune without a blush. The event has surprised me as little as any thing would that was equally unforeseen. Sackville's consent was not to be expected ; but the strange, mysterious manner in which it was given, seems to me perfectly natural and characteristic. Your scoundrel generally prefers a theatrical mode of doing good. The plain, simple, easy course pursued by common-place, honest people, is much too humble for the man who, as he seldom does a praiseworthy action, likes, *when* he does, to do it splendidly. I admire his proud refusal to accept your thanks—thanks for an act of common justice ! He knows that they are not due.

“ Do not think me ungrateful for speaking so severely of the man who saved your life. Such benefits would become injuries if they prevented us from estimating correctly the conduct and character of those who conferred them. The man who saves a thousand lives

obtains no privilege to play the villain. Establish the principle of making good deeds excuse bad ones, and morality becomes little more than a system of truck and barter. No one would have much more to do than just to keep his virtue at par, and saints and sinners might respectively exchange their moral scrip, like the bulls and bears of the Stock Exchange.

“ Make a balance-sheet of good deeds, available in a court of justice, and contemplate the consequences. The Humane Society, on the credit of their resuscitations, might emulate with impunity, the *noyades* of the Loire; and the fireman, who had saved a house, could never be hanged for burning one.

“ In the case of yourself and Sackville, I conceive the balance to have been fully adjusted. He saved your life before you were his rival: but since he has seen you in that character he has shown almost an equal disposition to take it. The return you owed him I con-

ceive to have been paid. You refused to contest his claims and you have long persisted in thinking better of him than he deserved.

“ Let me now turn to a more pleasing subject, the contemplation of your happy prospects. You are about to reap the reward of tried affection, and honourable self-denial, and to unite yourself to one who has proved that she is capable of something more than to flutter in the sunshine of prosperity: one who, though she can adorn society and enjoy its pleasures, has had the courage voluntarily to resign them: one who, through evil report and good report, if she dared not say she loved, at any rate esteemed you, and in the constancy of whose affection you may now repose the firmest confidence.

“ You will soon become a husband, and your actions will then be invested with a responsibility which they had not before. On this account, though I confess myself feebly qualified for the office of a Mentor, yet, in my

capacity of parent, let me give you my sentiments and advice. You will be placed above the necessity of a profession ; but let not this circumstance render you inactive. Continue in parliament, and attend strictly to its honourable and important duties. Cultivate society—cultivate business. I do not ask you to make yourself a slave to either, or to indulge in visions of ambition. I merely point out a course which I consider to be most conducive to your respectability and happiness.

“ The life of truest happiness is a life of occupation. I have acquired some right to say so, by having experienced the fallacy of its reverse. I do not mean that I have been unhappy. Were I to say so, I should be very ungrateful for numerous blessings. I have had a large share of all that is held to constitute the materials of happiness ; and none perhaps can have passed through life with fewer crosses. But it is on this account I speak. It is in reviewing my advantages that I am made

sensible that I have not been so happy as I ought to have been; and loaded as I am with benefits, I can estimate with greater accuracy the little that was wanting to complete the sum of my felicity.

“I know that I wanted occupation, and an object. I had neither a prospect to interest me, nor a gratifying retrospect: all was centred in the present. I set out with the advantages of good family, respectable station, ample fortune, and, I will add, no mean abilities. The three former I retain; but what use have I made of the latter? None,—I grieve to say it—none. Indolence and fastidiousness have prevented me. Cursed with a sensitive delicacy, and a hatred of exertion, I always quickly discovered something coarse, mean, or revolting in every thing that I had a disinclination to do. The paths to Parliament were miry; office, a state of corruption; all business brings one into contact with rogues; and even the exertions which society

demands may be reprobated as subserviency and cringing.

“I cared for nothing, and would do nothing. I was and would be independent—and independence has a flattering sound. It is the noblest, safest plea that was ever made for absence of exertion, and deserves to be engraved on the most towering pinnacle of the castle of indolence. I would not press, and labour, and elbow, and truckle: I would look with calm superiority on the distant turmoil, and enjoy the charms of literary leisure. Literary leisure! Choice and beautiful phrase! Its very alliteration is sweet and seductive. But call it by its true name, literary idleness, and how much of its fancied dignity is lost! Yet such was mine; and I can remember to have regarded exertion in that walk as a degrading drudgery. It is easy to wrap oneself up in fancied importance, and say, ‘my mind to me a kingdom is.’ Yes, such a king I was, but it was a *‘Roy faincant,’*

a sort of rural Sardanapalus in my petty territory.

“ Believe me when I say, that I now look back with pain on all that I have neglected to do. I have promoted no great or useful object—have connected my name with no interesting event—have written nothing—have spoken nothing—have impressed on no one the belief that I have those talents which I am really conscious of possessing. I write this, not in mortified pride, but in humble regret ; not with the hope of a complimentary refutation, but with the worthier hope of affording an useful warning to you.

“ Having spoken so freely of myself, I may say a little about your future father-in-law, and bid you draw other warnings from him. Morton and myself have been two opposites, between whose different lines of conduct I counsel you to pursue a middle course. I have sacrificed too little for society : he has sacrificed too much. Though I am sorry for his misfortunes,

I have some consolation in thinking that the consequences of his extreme have been by far the most serious. But, on the other hand, I am bound to consider that the misemployed advantages were much greater on my side. We had both of us sufficient fortune ; but he is of low extraction, and I of ancient descent. In me, perhaps, the consciousness of birth has encouraged an indolent security ; in him the want of it has led to the ruinous substitute of lavish ostentation.

“ I may, probably, be inclined to overrate the consequences of birth and station ; but they have, at least, this advantage, that they are the pledges of honourable conduct, and afford to pride a less sordid aliment than money. Wealth, if viewed as the chief source and ground-work of distinction, must infallibly narrow the mind of its possessor. The purse-proud man is generally allowed to be the least endurable of coxcombs. He is content with none but *conspicuous* points of superiority, and

will often secretly descend to meanness, from which an ancient lineage would have saved him. I conceive Morton to be naturally a generous, honourable, high-minded man. Some points of his conduct have evinced it. But the want of high descent to serve as a *fulcrum* to his ambition of fashionable distinction—his restless sense of insecurity—his feverish struggle for an eminence which he was to gain, partly by manœuvring and cringing, partly by means of a lavish expenditure—all this has debased an honourable mind, and led him through a long train of secret humiliation to one that was signal and decisive.

“ I once did him less than justice ; for, I will own, that I felt a secret jealousy of his success, which jealousy has since been extinguished by his fall. It shocked my aristocratical prejudices to perceive that a man, with less ostensible pretensions, was more courted than myself ; and those prejudices were fostered by seclusion. But I have learned to shake off some portion of

my former exclusiveness, and to applaud the liberal spirit of these times, which presents no insurmountable barrier to any species of ambition.

“Let me now congratulate you, my dear Herbert, on having escaped unhurt from the treachery and artifice by which you have been assailed. Let not your trials tend to give you a worse opinion of human nature; let them not weaken your honourable confidence and freedom from suspicion. You have pursued a straight and manly course, and it has led you to your safety. While knaves are ruining each other, by the vile acts which helped to raise them, the honest object of their mutual attack walks through unhurt and unsuspecting. But were it otherwise, were it necessary to repel the creatures with their own weapons, rather, I will say, than have recourse to the dirty task of countermining, it were better to be libelled and deceived, and be able to exclaim, like another Francis, ‘All is lost except our honour.’

“ I will say no more, for I seem to have given you too long a lecture, when I consider how little you need it.

“ And now, my dear Herbert, farewell, and with every heartfelt wish for the happiness of yourself, and your intended bride,

“ Believe me, ever your most affectionate father,

“ W. LACY.”

THE END.



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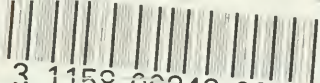
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